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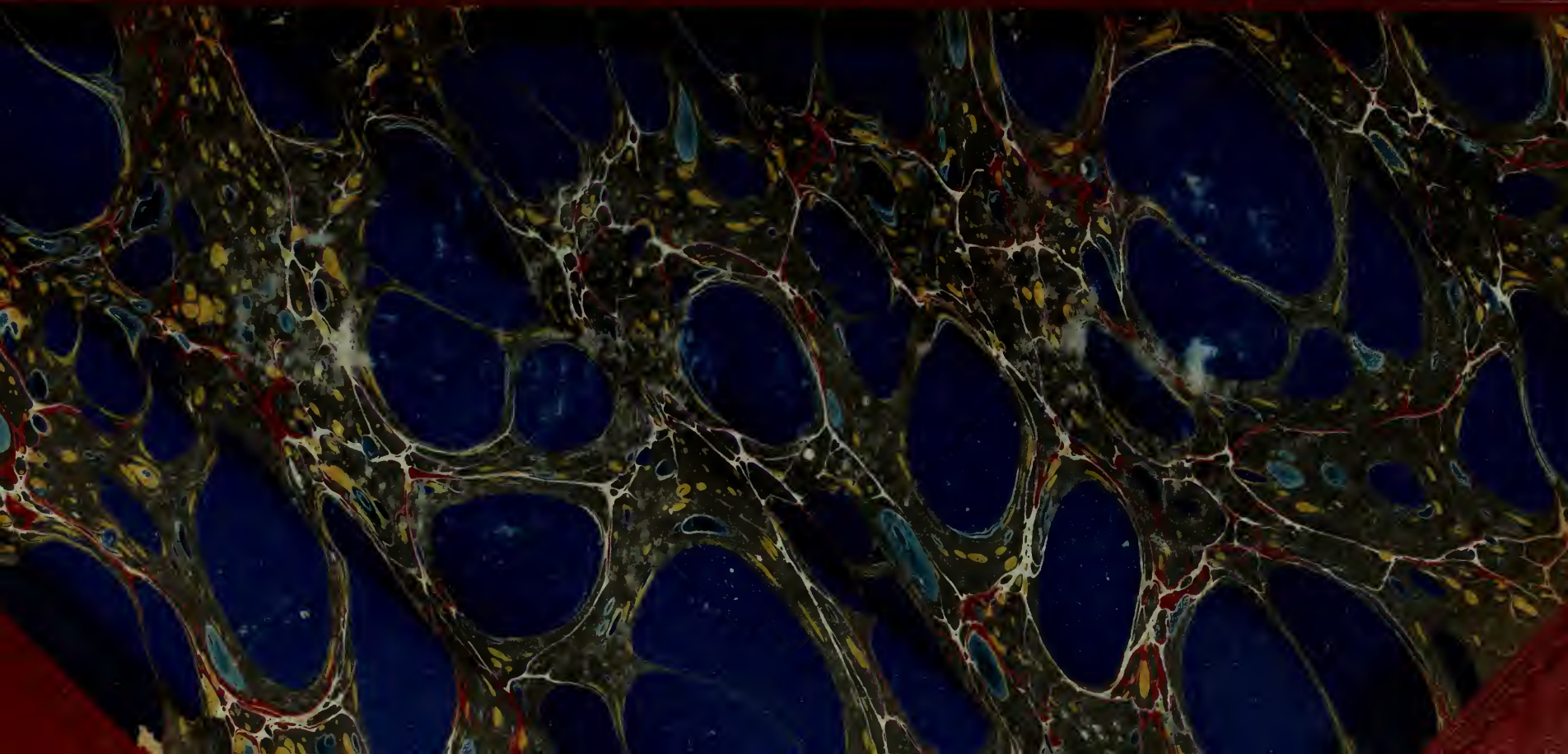

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R. AND E. TAYLOR. M. ELLEN STAPLES.

THE DOORS WERE FLUNG BACK, AND SIR JOHN ADVANCED SLOWLY, ON THE ARM OF HIS BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WIFE.

"Laden with Golden Grain."

THE

ARGOSY.

EDITED BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD.

VOLUME XXXVI.

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"The doors were flung back."
"She met his glance defiantly."
"Here they come!"
"She plunged her hand into her pocket, and flung several letters upon the table."
"She snatched a letter from his hand."
"If you have won her heart, take her."

By Frank Dadd.

In a Haunted House.

Illustrations to "Cruise of the Reserve Squadron."

THE ARGOSY.

JULY, 1883.

WINIFRED POWER.

CHAPTER XIX.

LADY HATHERLEY.

MISS DALLAS to be Lady Hatherley!" "That girl!" "A governess!" "Perhaps an adventuress!" "Beautiful." "I never admired her." "Sir John has better taste." "Sir John must be in his dotage." "She's magnificent." "Very bad style." "Clever, too, by Jove." "A flippant intriguer." "You are prejudiced." "You are blinded." "You are jealous." "Of what, I should like to know?"

Thus in a crescendo of horror; with a chorus of depreciation; was the astounding news of Sir John Hatherley's impending marriage received by the inhabitants of Elmsleigh.

To say that Mrs. Hatherley, and Flossie with her, nearly went out of their minds, is but feebly to describe the height, depth and extent of their amazed exasperation. Mrs. Hatherley came out in quite a new character, so extraordinary was the activity which she displayed in going from house to house, pouring into the ears of her acquaintances the various innuendoes and suggestions concerning Gertrude once conveyed to her by Mrs. Chandos-Fane, now Mrs. Burton.

Not all her angry spite, however, could give her the courage to remonstrate with Sir John; but she did try to convey to Mark the essence of Mrs. Burton's communications. Needless to say, she took nothing by the move. Mark asked a few sharp questions which scattered Mrs. Hatherley's wits, and demonstrated the insufficiency of her information. Coldly remarking then that accusations so grave required some stronger proof before they could be even considered, far less believed, he dismissed the subject, and maintained unbroken the attitude of courteous reserve which he had assumed from the first moment of learning his father's intentions. Mark could not be expected to welcome these with any cordiality; nor did he; but his fastidious disinterestedness made him shrink from all appearance of

protest. He treated Gertrude with a grave and even kindly deference that compelled her reluctant gratitude. It was owing to his influence, unconsciously exercised over her, that she bore herself in these days with a graceful and new humility which went a long way towards disarming hostile criticism. Like many people of quick tact, she was very far indeed from being thoroughly insincere. Her mobile nature was too responsive to various moods for that. She felt as well as saw what other people were feeling; every quality in her—violence, generosity, selfishness, benevolence—was partly spontaneous, partly deliberate; and it was the very complexity of nature in her, resulting from all this, which made half her power to charm. A narrower soul than hers would not have appreciated Mark's high-mindedness; a nobler one would have been forced by it into a renunciation of personal aims. But Gertrude Dallas remained at once both calculating and grateful. In her dreams of the future, Mark played a prominent part. She intended to do a great deal for him; and already had a foretaste of the exultation she should feel in compelling his recognition of her power.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Hatherley had nothing for it but to wait with such patience as she could muster for the day of Mrs. Burton's return from her fortnight's wedding tour. She confidently believed that this would also be the hour of her triumph. Mrs. Burton would tell what she knew of Gertrude's past; and the credit which had been denied to Mrs. Hatherley would be accorded to her.

Never were well-founded expectations more bitterly disappointed. Ideas in Mrs. Burton's mind bobbed up and down with the rapidity and impartiality of peas in boiling-water. This was especially the case when any novelty excited her; and just now between Mr. Burton and wedding presents, new dresses and congratulatory visits, her life was a series of novelties. Under these circumstances, it was just a chance which impulse might come uppermost in her. Mrs. Burton in the morning was as capable of snubbing Miss Dallas as in the afternoon she was capable of adoring her; it all depended upon the aspect of the question which good-humour and self-interest or ill-humour and self-absorption combined to present to her. The first of these connections was predominant in her on the day when she heard the news of Sir John's engagement. A quarter of an hour later saw her in the drawing-room of The Limes. And just as Mrs. Hatherley, enchanted to see her, had opened her lips for her now habitual plaint, and Flossie's eyes were already suffused with the dew of coming tears, Mrs. Burton took the breath out of both of them by sweetly smiling, and asking with the liveliest interest, for "dear Sir John" and "the beautiful bride-elect."

On a sign from the speechless Mrs. Hatherley, her daughter limply rang the bell, and Gertrude was produced from the library. Mrs. Burton immediately folded her in her arms, and asked if she had not always prophesied for her a destiny in accordance with her merits.

"I dare say you did," replied Gertrude, with one of her subtle smiles, "but I am not quite sure that you always considered my merits very striking. Did you?"

"My dear child, you surely know me by this," said Mrs. Burton. You are, you *must* be, aware that I abhor flattery. My sincerity often forbids me to say what I think for fear of being misinterpreted. But how could I ever have been animated by any sentiments but those of affectionate interest towards the bosom-friend of my darling daughter? Dear Winifred! don't you miss her? *I* do."

"But you have Mr. Burton," said Gertrude.

"And you will soon have Sir John. I know what you mean. But a mother's feelings are so complex! They consist in—they are —in short, they defy description. I have I think the power of adapting myself to young people, and my pet and I were always *one.* I never should have married again—*never*—if duty had not called my unselfish Winifred to the side of her suffering uncle."

"You were engaged ever so long before Miss Power went back to Paris," snapped the goaded Mrs. Hatherley.

A shadow of aversion contracted the pupils of Mrs. Burton's limpid blue eyes. "I presume I know my own affairs," she retorted, icily, and turned her back upon the discomfited widow. From that moment the partisanship of the vicar's wife was assured to Gertrude.

But it did not help her. The clamour of spiteful gossip only rose with contradiction; and Mrs. Burton, whose own golden locks and airy grace had always been looked upon with some disfavour, did herself more harm than good to her protégée. Public opinion, that capricious thing, was not to be conciliated. Gertrude Dallas had run counter to it in a way to render it inexorable, and found herself permanently beneath its ban.

Even Sir John's suavity, formerly so irresistible, had lost its ancient spell. In vain he gave dinners as of old; called frequently upon his neighbours; struck attitudes, and made speeches full of a weighty dignity. His wand was broken, his day was done. Odd stories were afloat about him; vague rumours that gained in consistency as they persisted. The tendency to treat him as a benevolent elderly gentleman who had grown a little whimsical and cranky, suddenly gave way to the idea that he was in the plenitude of his strength, and as artful as he was strong. Tradesmen, so long obsequious, became pressing in their demands, and Mark received some very strange anonymous epistles. They caused him to look grave, but he took no notice of them, nor did he mention them at this time to his father.

In the midst of all this Sir John fell ill. He had a very bad attack of his heart, necessitating the frequent attendance of the family Doctor. Formerly the man of medicine had been only too honoured by a call to The Limes. Now, even he seemed to come with something less of fervour than of old. He did not stay so long; nor listen

quite so patiently to Sir John's account of his distressing symptoms; nor mask with quite so bland a smile the gravity of some of them.

Altogether an odd, atmospheric change overhung The Limes—a change, vague but brooding like an impending storm: Mrs. Hatherley herself was affected by it, as are all feline creatures by electrical disturbances. Her eyes were brighter and more watchful; her tread was stealthier; her restlessness worse than ever.

Gertrude was no longer staying at The Limes. Sir John, without assigning any precise reason, had asked Mrs. Burton if the bride-elect might have the shelter of her roof until the day for the wedding; and the vicar's wife had acceded to the request with eagerness. She was more anxious than she had ever been to conciliate the master of The Limes; and apparently did not remark, far less understand, the meaning of the neighbourhood's new attitude. Mr. Burton, douce man, was one of those worthy souls (unhappily too rare) from whom gossip ran like water off a duck's back. A few of the current reports did indeed make some small impression on him, and he repeated them to his wife; but she promptly put them down to "jealousy—unadulterated jealousy;" and he was far too goodnaturedly obtuse not to find comfort in agreeing with her.

Sir John's original intention was to have celebrated his wedding with great magnificence. But his brother-in-law's death, he considered, rendered this impossible—more especially as he would not delay his marriage, but hurried forward the arrangements for it, and fixed the earliest possible date compatible with the due publication of the banns. He settled that he and his bride should drive to the station from the church. There was to be no wedding-breakfast, and no fuss of any kind. And the only person, save his own family, to be invited to the ceremony was Mrs. Burton.

"Dear me!" tittered Mrs Hatherley, upon hearing this. "People will say you have lost money."

Mark looked up quickly; perhaps in surprise at the tactless impertinence of the observation; one that his aunt would not have ventured upon a few months before.

Sir John's pale lips curled contemptuously as he answered: "The best answer to that will be the diamond parure which I have ordered for Miss Dallas."

The parure arrived a day or two later, and nearly robbed Mrs. Burton of sleep. She gave an afternoon tea for the express purpose of exhibiting it, and strange to say the entertainment was a success! The ladies whose rapid tongues had been so busy of late in stigmatising Miss Dallas as an adventuress and in slighting her future husband arrested the flow of their eloquence at sight of these unparalleled jewels.

It was truly remarkable, the effect produced upon public opinion by these splendid gems. They certainly did not make Gertrude any better loved, but in some occult manner they caused her to be more

warmly received. And when at last her wedding morning dawned, quiet though the ceremony was, it gained brilliancy through the affluence of uninvited guests. All Elmsleigh that had leisure at its disposal was present in the Church. And if there was one thing which struck all spectators more than the suffering air of the bridegroom or the gravity of Mark, it was the deadly pallor of the bride.

Gertrude had indeed good cause to look pale, for she had passed a sleepless and an agitated night. And the cause of it had been a very unexpected interview with Mark. He had followed his father after dinner into the library, and there quietly, although with evident reluctance, laid before him one of the anonymous letters which he had lately received. Sir John cast his eyes over it in silence; then crushed it in his hand and tossed it into the fire, which the chilliness of the rainy evening rendered necessary.

"That is the way to treat such communications," he said, glacially, though he looked a little disturbed.

"It is the way in which I have treated many such of late, sir," answered Mark, gently. "And I should not have attached more importance to this letter than to its predecessors, if it were not for reports daily growing louder, both around us here and in the city."

"You have been spying," exclaimed his father, harshly.

"I am not in the habit of spying," replied Mark. "As long as it was honestly possible I shut both my eyes and my ears. But to-day I was told that the Aztec Mine Company is decidedly shaky." Of this Sir John was one of the Directors, and a large shareholder.

"Do you suppose me likely to be more ignorant of that fact, if true, than yourself?" he asked.

Mark drove back the retort which rose to his lips—viz.: that his father might be more careless of it. Even in anger he would not admit to himself that Sir John could be dishonest. "One is often too long unwilling to believe the worst where one's own interests are concerned," he said, after a pause.

"I appreciate your inference," answered the elder man, scornfully. "But I cannot see that the affair is any business of yours."

"We will not speak of honour then," said Mark, rather hotly. "But you can surely understand that I should not like you to be ruined."

"And do you suppose, then, that I have put all my eggs in one basket?" With a sudden change of manner, Sir John laid his finger tips together and asked the question dispassionately.

Mark made no answer. He was indeed curiously ignorant of the sources and extent of his father's wealth. "Have you seen any change lately in my mode of life?" continued Sir John. "Have I dismissed any servants? Sold any horses? Put down a carriage? Diminished the courses at dinner? Been mean in my gifts?"

"There is a great deal of money owing to the tradespeople, sir."

Sir John frowned. "Let them apply for it," he said, grandly.

"If I am rightly informed they have applied, and not successfully."

The other struck his foot impatiently on the floor. "Can you not leave me in peace, Mark? What is it you want by coming now to worry me with these foolish details? Butchers—bakers—what are they that you should trouble yourself all at once about them? Let them wait. I suppose you are angry with me for marrying again, and this is how you show it."

Mark stood listening in surprise. There was something very childish in this sudden outburst of weak passion, and it suggested to him that possibly after all he had attributed to want of money in his father that which might be nothing more than an effect of the unaccountable avarice of old age. Sir John, leaning forward in his chair and trembling with excitement, struck his son as looking older than he had ever seen him. His form, clothed in the black-velvet dressing-gown, had a shrunken appearance, and his outstretched, shaking hand seemed unusually feeble. Mark was touched. "I am sorry," he began kindly—then stopped, arrested in his speech by the flash of unconcealable triumph that lightened in his father's eyes. The next moment Sir John's head sunk a little lower on his breast and he was trembling more violently than ever; but that glance had done its work. Mark knew now that, debtor or miser, invalid or vigorous, his father was a hypocrite. The revelation came upon him with a force which admitted no room for doubt.

"If I had been angry at your marriage, sir, I should not have waited until now, the eleventh hour, to protest," answered Mark, steadily. "Still less should I have chosen the form of protest which you attribute to me. I came in here this evening with the double purpose of learning, if possible, the truth about your affairs, and of communicating two resolutions of mine to you. I have determined to enter a house of business in the city: thus renouncing, at any rate for the present, that dream of a political career which alone has reconciled me to partial inaction, and to a large dependence of my future fortunes upon yours."

He paused, not because he had finished, but because Sir John had raised his head to speak.

"You can do as you please," he interrupted, in a tone of cold scorn. "Such a step on your part will naturally give colour to the reports against me; but I can happily afford to despise rumours. Only do not ask me to advance any money for your new enterprise."

"I have never asked you for money," replied his son, all the more calmly that his patience was ebbing fast.

"And your second resolution?" enquired Sir John, with sarcastic politeness.

"It is to remonstrate—with no hope of deterring her, but simply to satisfy my own conscience—with Miss Dallas on her intention to marry you."

"I forbid it," cried Sir John. Really angry this time, he rose.

"And I must disobey you, father," and Mark rapidly quitted the room.

Gertrude was very much surprised to see him, as was Mrs. Burton. That little lady, indeed, underwent agonies of curiosity when Mark asked to speak alone with her guest; and as she reluctantly gathered together her work, and retired to disturb Mr. Burton's after-dinner nap in his own peculiar sanctum, the wildest hypotheses trotted in a mazy circle through her small, romantic brain.

"Is anything the matter? Sir John is unwell perhaps?" began Gertrude, and became aware of a curious throb, half-fear, half-relief, as she asked the question. To be anything less than Lady Hatherley would be a bitter disappointment; all the same, she looked forward to the morrow with a sinking heart.

"My father is quite well," answered the young man. He had declined the offer of a chair, and stood leaning against the chimney-piece and looking down upon her as she sat with the light from the lamp falling on her graceful head. She looked very young and pretty this evening; and her mental agitation had given her an air of gentleness that was rare in her. A new pity succeeded in Mark to the slightly scornful indifference with which he had regarded her, since knowing that she was to be his father's wife.

"I have come, impelled by a sense of duty to a task very reluctantly and tardily undertaken," he began. "For the last ten days or so I have received frequent hints that my father's affairs are going badly. The hints were of such a nature that I did not consider it necessary to attach any importance to them. Doubtless my hesitation was unconsciously helped by a natural unwillingness to believe them. But to-day I received a warning of a much more serious sort; one which, if true, would point to an impending grave change in my father's circumstances."

"He has lost money?" asked Gertrude, quickly.

"At any rate, he seems likely to do so."

She drew a long breath of bitterness. Had she been trapped? Was this the cause of Sir John's apparent avarice? How could she have been so blind? Humiliation at her own short-sightedness was, perhaps, the strongest of all the feelings roused within her.

"Please tell me everything," she said, and clasped her hands tightly in the effort to be calm.

Mark related all that he knew; the reports about the Aztec Mine Company, the anonymous letters, the sums owing to the tradespeople, and his own interview with his father.

"Except the business of the Mine, you have told me nothing very definite," Gertrude remarked, as he ended.

"I have told you all I know," he answered, coldly, his momentary softness of feeling towards her already changing at her hard and mercenary manner.

She sat lost in meditation. If only this news had come to her a

little earlier! Now, surely, it was too late for her to draw back. Intriguing though she was, she shrank from the meanness of such a course. Had she been convinced of Sir John's impending ruin—convinced beyond the possibility of doubt—she would have thrown him over ruthlessly. But ignorance made her doubtful; and doubt brought into play all those dramatic instincts in her which simulated noble qualities. If she clung to Sir John now, Mark would admire her; and, in the event of a catastrophe, he would do something for her. The desire to be approved of by Mark had always been very strong in her; and her roused vanity, reckless as the impulse of a gambler, suggested to her, in this moment of uncertainty, to sacrifice everything to that one chance. She raised her eyes, and met her companion's quiet, observant glance.

"This news can make no difference to me," she said, simply. "If Sir John is to be ruined, my place is at his side."

Mark made a gesture of surprise. He was far from being duped; and yet, man-like, he was touched. Is it the confession of weakness implied in womanly wiles, which renders these partially successful even with the men whom they do not deceive? Whatever the psychological explanation, it is a fact that Mark for the first time was conscious of a faint liking for his future step-mother. There was not much esteem in the feeling, but it was dashed by no resentment, rather by a quaint compassion.

"Have you ever seriously reflected what it is to marry a man old enough to be your father?" he asked her, not unkindly.

"I never reflect. Reflection is the luxury of the happy, Mr. Hatherley."

And then Gertrude covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears. They were tears compounded of many feelings—of shock, of rage, of a little shame, of a vast deal of mere mental fatigue; but they were the most appropriately-managed outburst which ever put an end to an inconvenient discussion, and rendered an estimable young man speechless. Before Gertrude had overcome the first paroxysm of her sobs, and Mark the pained surprise of hearing them, the door opened, and, amid a buzz of voices, appeared Mrs. Burton's inquisitive golden head, closely accompanied by the rubicund visage of her husband, and the pale countenance of Sir John!

"My love!" cried the vicar's wife, and struck an attitude of indignant consternation, accompanied by a withering glance at Mark. But Gertrude sprang to her feet, and rushed almost into Sir John's arms.

"Your son has been so kind," she exclaimed, a little hysterically. "And I do—oh! I *do* think it was noble of you to send him to me."

Sir John, all the more struck with the nobility of his action that he had been totally unaware of it, bowed devotionally over his betrothed's white hand; Mrs. Burton smiled seraphically; Mr.

Burton, profoundly bewildered, said, "Bless my soul!" by way of a compendious contribution to the prevailing emotion; and Mark, while marching to the window ostensibly to gaze upon the night, admitted to himself that Miss Gertrude Dallas was indisputably mistress of the situation!

CHAPTER XX.

IN PARIS AGAIN.

"THE wedding was a *great* success," wrote Mrs. Burton enthusiastically to her daughter. "So quiet. In such good taste. I was the only guest. I believe dear Sir John was kind enough to feel that the ceremony would lose a little *something* if I were not present; but he was *wisely* determined not to invite anybody else. Our pet—yours, love, and *mine!*—looked lovely in her wedding-dress, with the magnificent diamonds—which you will SEE! I could have wished—perhaps—that your dear stepfather had read the beautiful service a little more impressively; but he did his best. Dear Gertrude was quite calm; but deadly pale. I had had an affecting parting with her. I think—*I hope*—that she will prove equal to her new and responsible position. It is not given to everybody to be the wife of such a man as Sir John. Mr. Burton—but *n'importe!* I missed *one* sweet face at the wedding, and that was my naughty, *naughty*, darling daughter's. Mr. Mark Hatherley looked *grumpy!* For me, he is a most disagreeable young man, although I know *you* do not think so, darling. That was the one, little wee, wee point on which we were sometimes not quite agreed, my angel. I believe—a little bird has whispered to me—that Mr. Hatherley was *furious* at his father's marriage. I suppose he thought it would put a spoke in his wheel. He came even the night before and tried to dissuade Gertrude. I feel *sure* of this, although I did not ask what passed. I did not wish to know. I always prefer to think good than evil. In fact, I almost fear sometimes that I am too unsuspicious. I need you, darling, with your penetration (a *little* censorious occasionally, don't you think? If you have a fault—it might be this), without you I am certain that I am constantly imposed upon. Mr. Burton———But he has his parish-work. I am interrupted—A rheumatic old woman—I constantly tell Mr. Burton that I believe these people's ailments and sorrows to be chiefly imaginary. But he preaches patience. I fancy he thinks patience *looks* well. I kiss my darling's pretty cheeks, and I am always her loving, foolish, fond little Mamsey."

Dolly, expiring with curiosity to hear all about the wedding, was disappointed that Winifred did not read some portions of this letter aloud to her. And she wondered still more at the mingled expression of annoyance and amusement with which Winifred perused it.

There was hardly a line in it which did not contain a sting; and the hints about Mark made her positively indignant; and yet, taken as a whole, what a diverting production it was! Mrs. Burton was one of those persons with whom nobody, blessed with a sense of humour, could feel angry long; and, though beginning to read the letter a second time with a frown, Winifred, before she reached the end of it, was fain to laugh.

"It is too bad of Florence not to have written. I suppose the wedding was *awfully* nice?" Dolly in her pet modern jargon enquired, encouraged by these signs of good humour.

"It was as quiet as possible—perhaps on account of Uncle Walter," answered Winifred, with a sigh. "That is a disappointment, isn't it Dolly? You think a marriage without 'trimmings no marriage at all?"

"I am not quite so foolish," replied the literal-minded Dolly, with some dignity. "I know *somebody* to whom I would go to be married in a hackney cab and a travelling-dress."

"Heroic!" commented Winifred, and again she laughed. Dorothy's perfect frankness about her feelings never failed to amuse her, probably by its contrast with her own proud reserve.

The absolute self-complacency that never doubts of ultimate success is of all ballast the surest with which a human soul can launch itself upon the troubled sea of life. Richard had not shown as yet the faintest sign of being in love; nevertheless Dolly Dallas would have gone at least the length of Traddles and bought a first instalment of her furniture.

While they were thus talking, a hurried rap at the studio door preceded the entrance of Mrs. Dallas.

"My dears!" said the good little woman, all in a flutter, "have you heard the news? Dear Gerty has actually persuaded Sir John to come on to Paris."

"Like any bride and bridegroom of the times—such centuries off they seem—when the Empire still was!" said Winifred, gaily.

The fateful 18th March was yet ten days or so in the future, and dwellers in Paris were curiously unprophetic of it. But the great city was still plunged in the stupor, and steeped in the shabbiness left by the first siege; and pleasure-seekers among its visitors were rare.

"She writes from Dover. They will be here in less than a week, and only stay three days!" Mrs. Dallas added, all excitement. Her whole mind was absorbed by the thought how best to welcome and most worthily to entertain the travellers. And when the eventful day of arrival dawned, Winifred and Dorothy were pressed into the service of her preparations.

The former, of course, did not wish to meet Sir John; and went home before the hour that he was expected. But late in the evening, after Martha Freake had gone to bed, she sat alone wondering whether she could see Gertrude, and learn something of Mark.

Presently two visitors were announced to her, and Lady Hatherley, accompanied by her brother, walked in.

Winifred sprang up with an exclamation of glad surprise.

"Sir John has retired to bed, knocked up by the journey, and Gerty, rather to the poor mother's mortification, it must be owned, insisted upon coming round to you," hastily explained Richard.

Gertrude loosened her cloak, and sank listlessly into a chair. She had hardly responded to Winifred's greeting, and looked pale and a little sullen.

"We think that marriage and fine clothes have greatly improved Gerty's *appearance*," politely remarked Dick, at the end of a rather embarrassed pause.

"But not my temper," said the bride, with one of her old scornful laughs. "Don't be scandalised, Winifred: you show just your old air of horrified propriety. Papa and Mamma are quite unchanged. They flourish under adversity, like the Micawbers. I might think I had never left home, if it were not for ——"

She stopped abruptly; put her hand to her breast, as though something there oppressed her; and burst into wailing sobs. There was no doubt about the genuineness of her emotion this time. Winifred startled, almost frightened, knelt down beside her, and took her hands, in a concerned effort at soothing. Richard began walking up and down the room. His indolent, kindly nature detested scenes.

"Why the deuce did you marry him?" he asked, almost angrily.

Gertrude raised her head, her eyes blazing through her tears. "I was a fool," she said, violently. "Are we not a family of fools, branded with ineptitude and failure from our birth? I thought I should be an old man's darling; lead him; cajole him; make all our fortunes. Dreams! dreams!"

Involuntarily Winifred rose and stood away from her. She was not a Pharisee, but this outburst revolted her, stung her honesty. Dick, a Dallas to his finger-tips, for all his easy good-nature, just shrugged his shoulders, but in scorn, not in protest.

"I don't see how you are to improve matters, Gerty, by these heroics," he said. "They are like your old tricks! The atmosphere of home seems to demoralise you."

She stopped sobbing at this; very angry, as ever, at being treated with contempt.

"Of course," continued her brother composedly, "Sir John is not exactly a pleasing companion. I should say, looking at him dispassionately, you understand, that he is often an intolerable bore. What with his airs and his graces, his beard and his dressing-gown, and his essential *deadness*, he is not more amusing, and he is considerably more insupportable, than a galvanised mummy."

She threw an angry look at him.

"I don't conceal from you, Gerty, that I was rather surprised when I heard you were going to marry him," continued Dick, lightly.

"But I appreciated your motives, and I thought it was plucky of you. Beggars, and beggars with such uncommonly few strokes of luck as ourselves, cannot be choosers, you see; and I thought you understood the difficulty of providing for yourself in any other way. I am sorry that you find the thing less agreeable than you expected; but I hope that in time you may become quite a model wife."

Lady Hatherley gave a harsh laugh; but her mood was evidently turning. While Winifred, boiling over with speechless indignation, felt that it would give her great satisfaction to box Dick's ears. The sympathy between the brother and the sister's nature was gradually asserting itself.

"You will have many opportunities of being useful and kind to him," went on Dick, with undiminished placidity. "I don't care to preach, you know; but I think there is a certain satisfaction in doing one's duty when it does not cost too much. And, even to take a lower point of view—he is rich."

"I believe him to be on the verge of bankruptcy," flashed out Gertrude, with an odd kind of triumph. "Yes, it's true."

Dick stood stock still, in dismayed amazement.

"You think it is a joke!" cried his sister. "I believe it to be the grimmest fact. His son (he is honest at any rate, Winifred) gave me a hint of his fears. And besides this, what other explanation is there of Sir John's persistent stinginess?" continued she, in too angry a mood not to speak out freely.

"Is he stingy? To be sure, he did make me ——" Dick stopped short in his speech, and resumed his promenade up and down the room; his expression a very curious one; betraying doubt, enlightenment, and annoyance.

"He would not let me buy the smallest gift for any of you, not even for Georgie," cried the bride.

With a sudden movement, Dick thrust his hand into his breast-pocket. "Sir John put this into my hand half an hour ago. I wonder what it is. Perhaps a cornelian stud?" And with a laugh at his own little joke, Dick proceeded to open a small oblong packet.

"Not much stinginess here!" he exclaimed, and produced a magnificent ruby scarf-pin.

Gertrude took it, looked at it, returned it. "I don't understand him," she said; but her tone was unmistakably gratified.

"And there are your diamonds?" resumed Dick. "They don't look like ruin, either."

A pause. Then Gertrude said, quietly, "Winifred is disgusted at us." And indeed, Winifred looked it.

A dusky red flushed into Richard's dark cheeks. He hesitated a moment, then drew near to her and held out his hand. "Do not think badly of us, Winifred—dear, kind Winifred! You are almost the only true friend our graceless ways have left us."

There was a thrill of very unusual feeling in his voice, and the

girl thus appealed to could do no less than lay her hand in his. But she shook her fair head, and answered gently:

"That is always your attitude, Richard: a cynical indifference to everything and everybody. I am sure you have just as many friends as other people, only you don't recognise them when you see them." She looked up in his face with her sunny smile, and was surprised, pained even, at the new earnestness of Dick's glance.

"At any rate, I recognise *your* goodness," he answered, in a low voice—so low that she barely caught the words. Gertrude did not hear them at all.

"It would be much better for you to recognise goodness in the abstract," Winifred answered, lightly. "But, there! we will talk no more about ourselves."

Lady Hatherley rose. "It is getting late, and we must go. Will you come out with me to-morrow, Winifred? I want to go to some shops. Yes? At three, then. Good night, and forget my melodrama. I believe it was your austere eyes provoked it—partly. You looked like Minerva."

So saying, with a laugh, Gertrude kissed her friend on both cheeks, French fashion, and darted into the ante-chamber. Winifred lighted them downstairs, and took care to avoid Dick's eyes. But she smiled to herself afterwards, with a sensation of relief; for she *felt* that he had not looked at her.

The next day, when Gertrude came to fetch Winifred she had resumed quite her old insouciant, slightly-mocking air. She made no further allusion to Sir John than this: "I have received orders to get myself one or two handsome dresses, he likes me to look well; so perhaps I shall be able to squeeze out money for some little present for Georgie. I did not bring her with me, because she would have wanted too much."

They went to the Louvre, and made several purchases there. "I have only fifty francs left after all," said Gerty, finally; "but it will be enough to get Georgie a porte-bonheur that I saw this morning in the Rue de la Paix, and that is sure to please her.

They set off at a brisk walk under the arcade, laughing occasionally at some memory of their first girlhood, recalled by the scenes around them; and commenting on the new aspect of things, so changed since the delusive brilliancy of the Empire.

Suddenly Gertrude uttered an exclamation, and stopped short. Equally arrested in his progress had been an extremely rakish, fashionable, yet somewhat dilapidated-looking personage, who took a cigar from his mouth, and said, "Hallo!" very coolly.

Winifred stared at him in profound astonishment; this attracting his attention, he had the grace to lift his hat to her. Gertrude, who seemed annoyed but not the least embarrassed, walked with him out of Winifred's hearing, and began a rapid, low-toned conversation. This lasted several minutes; Winifred's curiosity the while being

considerably exercised. Diligently employing her eyes, she arrived at the conclusion that the man must be a gentleman, as society understands the word, but was now fallen from his "high estate," and that he knew Gertrude well.

Once during the conversation Winifred noticed that the stranger drew back a step, and pursed up his mouth to a whistle of gratified, slightly sardonic amazement. Was Gertrude telling him of her marriage, she wondered? After this, the man produced a pocket-book, and handed his fair acquaintance a card. Gertrude apparently gave him hers in return; at any rate she gave him something. And then they parted; the man with an unceremonious nod; Lady Hatherley with a mere turn of her classic and haughty profile, that was more contemptuous than the curtest dismissal. On rejoining Winifred, Gertrude gave her a swift glance, compounded of questioning, a certain shame-facedness, and an odd sort of triumph. Probably, with her usual theatricism, she only wanted to be questioned, to have told her friend some rigmarole to which her imagination, insincerity, and good-nature would have contributed in equal shares. But Winifred asked no questions; and Gertrude vouchsafed no explanation.

They reached the Place Vendôme at last, but Gertrude did not turn in the direction of the Rue de la Paix.

"And Georgie's bangle?" said Winifred.

"I shall not get it. Where's the use?"

"Then will you give her something else?"

"I shall not give her anything at all. I cannot afford it."

Winifred was quite sure that Gertrude would never deprive Georgie of a present out of mere caprice. When her own wants were provided for, she was invariably ready to supply other people's. Moreover, the significance of her tone implied, as it was probably intended to do, that she had the fifty francs no longer. Was that what she had given to the mysterious individual? Winifred could not help smiling to herself at the idea of his possibly turning out nothing more than a gentleman beggar—some Bohemian protégé of Gertrude's, whom she was graciously pleased to patronise, and whom she regally released from obligations of deference.

A day or two later, Sir John and his bride returned to England, leaving Mrs. Dallas highly pleased, if nobody else was.

"Everything turns out for the best," said the good little woman. "I always used to tell Mr. Dallas that dear Gerty's wilfulness was superficial. And now you will believe me, I suppose, you incredulous man!" This with a playful shake of her head at her lord.

"Your arguments, my dear, now as always, are irrefragable," replied Mr. Dallas, with a gravity that made Winifred smile, and then kiss Mrs. Dallas's gentle face in remorse for having smiled.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SECRET DRAWER.

ELMSLEIGH called reluctantly on the bride—but it called. One or two recent acts of munificence on Sir John's part, combined with the payment of some of the bills, had rather stilled the vague rumours against him; and the announcement of an impending series of magnificent dinner parties did the rest. "I engaged a cordon bleu when I was in Paris: he will be over shortly," said the knight carelessly to Mrs. Burton, who went about telling everybody.

"They are to be more like banquets," she added, to the world. "Dear Sir John has lately been grieved about so many things, hat he has only given récherché little dinners of twelve covers. But these coming entertainments are not to consist of less than twenty-four, and all the beautiful plate is to be brought down from London."

Sir John had formerly been very profuse in the exhibition of this beautiful plate; but about a year previously, when there had been a "burglar scare," he had sent the more massive articles to the safe keeping of his bankers.

Elmsleigh thought it would be a pity to find itself shut out from the dinners, even though the new Lady Hatherley was to preside at them. Consequently, it called. And Gertrude then had it entirely in her own power to turn the tide of public feeling in her favour. A beautiful young woman, exquisitely dressed, and surrounded with everything that wealth can give, is more easily snubbed in theory than in practice.

The most uncompromising matrons of Elmsleigh felt the frozen geniality within them thaw when they crossed the threshold of the splendid drawing-room, where their foot-falls died away upon costly carpets, and their senses reeled amid the fragrance of hothouse plants. The smallest sign of graciousness then on the part of Gertrude would have completed their surrender. But she was singularly haughty, silent, cold. She hated her new life, and not less so the people around her, and was full of the bitterness of revolt. She had expected to get the upper hand of everybody, beginning with her husband. Instead of that, she could find nothing to dominate. In some indescribable way, everything around her seemed to have a mocking unreality. Partly it might be the disenchantment of her first married days that had done this; but chiefly it was caused by the strange inscrutability of Sir John. He cast upon her something of the spell of paralysed fascination which years before he had thrown upon his sister. But while Mary, frightened, submitted, Gertrude inwardly rebelled. The days went on. Gertrude grew pale, nervous, miserable. She had no friends, and tried to make none. Mark, who might have been of some help to her, was now almost constantly away. He had taken lodgings in London and only came down to

The Limes on Saturdays to stay until Monday. He was invariably kind to Gertrude; but so preoccupied with thoughts, or possibly anxieties, of his own, that for a long time he did not notice her troubled look. One day at last, it struck him. He was bidding her farewell, and as he took her hand she involuntarily raised her eyes to his with so despairing a glance that he felt a shock of surprise.

"Are you ill?" he asked, kindly.

"In mind, not in body," answered Gertrude, with a wan smile. Mark murmured something which sounded like "Poor soul!" and she winced a little at the pity, for she had not intended to provoke it. "I have made my bed, and must lie on it," she said, and released her hand with a bitter laugh. As she turned, she met the watchful glance of Mrs. Hatherley. This woman's stealthy observation of her never ceased! It was another exasperating element in Gertrude's life. And Florence was even more insupportable than her mother. She was a dull, mechanical spy; and reported to Mrs. Hatherley everything that Gertrude did, from what she wore to what she eat; from the letters she received, to the walks she took abroad; from the flowers that she tended, to the hours wearily consumed by her in the library with Sir John.

One evening Gertrude went abruptly to her husband. Though full of a purpose of her own, her quick glance noted the sudden stealthy way in which on her entrance he thrust a bundle of papers into a drawer of the bureau by which he was standing. But she asked no questions: what were his affairs to her?

"I wish," she said, "that you would get rid of Mrs. Hatherley and Florence. Their presence is unbearable to me."

She did not make the request very graciously; but it was simply wrung from her by her irritation. If it were granted—good; but she would not plead for it.

"Nobody would be better pleased to get rid of them than I," answered Sir John, with unusual promptitude.

"Then why have you kept them here so long?" returned his wife.

"For the reasons which generally lead one to be patient under burdens—a great deal of pity, mixed with some little duty." This answer was received by Gertrude with inward contempt. She did not believe a word of it.

After a pause, she said with some irony: "I presume your second reason—duty—would be satisfied by maintaining them away?"

"Maintaining them? Well, I suppose so," Sir John replied slowly. He put his fingers together, and scrutinised their tips, as though seeking in them some information.

They were interrupted by the entrance of Mark. It was Saturday, and he had arrived by the seven o'clock train. He looked unusually grave even for him, and greeted them absently, at the same time glancing at Gertrude rather as though her presence were in his way.

"Mark," began his father, still with that new briskness, "Gertrude was just speaking to me on a very important subject—one indeed which I have long debated with myself. She thinks it is quite time we were relieved of the burden of your aunt and cousin."

"Of their *presence*," corrected Lady Hatherley.

Mark made no immediate answer. He had turned quickly to look towards the door, which was ajar and creaking oddly. Another creak, and a decided, slight movement, like that of a curtain gently stirred by the wind. Mark strode forward, an angry frown on his brow, and threw the door back. This unexpectedly revealed Flossie in a new and very pretty dinner-dress, with an expression suddenly changing from rapt attention to piteousness.

"I—I—just want a book," she stammered.

"You are not likely to find it on the *outside* of the door," said Mark, with careless courtesy. "Won't you step in?"

"I think Florence pursues a good number of studies in that coign of vantage," remarked Gertrude.

"While you are about it, you might learn how to make door-mats. Even *that* is a respectable industry," followed up Sir John, unpleasantly humorous. Flossie, needless to say, was already drowned in tears; and Mark as inevitably vanquished, felt angry with himself for having exposed her. But he knew her tricks of old; they had always annoyed him; and to-day he was in no mood to submit to needless annoyance.

"Take what you want and run away," he said, with rough good-nature. Flossie hastily seized upon a Greek lexicon, and unmindful of Mark's amused smile, dashed with this useful prize from the room.

"Gertrude wants me to turn them out; and I think she is right," pursued Sir John to his son.

"You mistake me," interposed his wife, coldly. "I want you to maintain them under some other roof than this."

"I don't see why Florence should not be made to work," said he. "If she became a daily teacher, now that Dorothy is away, she might support herself and her mother also."

"Good Heavens! What could she teach?" exclaimed Mark. Everyone of the trio knew what a dunce she was.

"I have done enough for them," Sir John resumed doggedly.

"You have done so much, sir, that it seems to me you are bound to do to the end," answered his son.

"I will trouble you not to lecture," retorted Sir John. "A little more and I will turn Mrs. Hatherley and her daughter adrift this very night."

"Not to please me, then," said Gertrude, rising. "I withdraw my request. I would far rather endure any spying and any insult than that your son should be pained by an act of injustice committed in my name."

"You are suddenly become very tender of your stepson's feelings, madam," snarled her husband.

"Not so," she answered. "I am only grateful to him for having restored to me my faith in human nature."

Then feeling how melodramatic this must sound to the cold, self-contained, reserved Mark, she quitted the room.

Sir John sardonically observed that she was always in heroics. Mark made no reply, for his mind was full of facts which he had come to communicate to his father.

That evening there was to be a dinner-party at The Limes. Not indeed one of the large banquets announced by Mrs. Burton—only twelve people in all.

The guests were politely concerned on arriving to be told that Sir John was very unwell. Just as he had finished dressing for dinner he had been seized in the usual way, and was even now being treated with smelling salts and brandy in his bed-room. Nevertheless he was rallying; and his friends were only entreated to have a little kind patience. So they waited, endeavouring with indifferent success to forget their hunger in looking at photographs, and entertained by Mrs. Hatherley, whose absent air was put down to anxiety, while Flossie had reddened eyelids. Presently Mark came in, very pale and a little stern; announcing, however, that his father was better.

And then, five minutes later, the folding-doors were flung back, and Sir John, wax-like, rather feeble, but picturesque, patient and benign, advanced slowly on the arm of his beautiful and haughty-looking young wife. He was full of courteous excuses; of noble endurance, and waived away all enquiries with the stoic observation that the first thing now to be done was to dine. He exchanged Gertrude's arm for that of a stout dowager, and remarked as he led her towards the dining-room that, like Charles II., he ought to apologise for being so long in dying.

"Goodness, Sir John! but you are already better," exclaimed the worthy dame.

"Mine is a mere death-in-life. Pain is consuming me by inches."

The dowager felt embarrassed and, as she afterwards averred, for the first two courses and an entrée, ate no more than a bird. "In which case," somebody remarked, "the bird she must have meant was a cormorant."

Sir John had never been more transcendental than on this occasion. He was apparently racked by pain, and made everybody uncomfortable who looked at him; he persisted in talking, and his utterances were formed with a fastidious and lofty morality; but he was not exactly amusing. Mark scarcely opened his lips, and Gertrude looked a trifle more bored than usual. Nevertheless the guests were satisfied, for they were right-royally fed.

May, that terrible May of 1871, was drawing to its close; and the talk inevitably turned on burning Paris. Much sympathy was ex-

pressed with Lady and Mrs. Hatherley, who had relatives there; but the former carelessly said that they had received telegrams which set their minds at ease.

After dinner, in the drawing-room, the conversation went droning along; the weary wheel of platitude turning, turning; only stayed occasionally when some young lady mildly warbled a ditty; and red-faced old gentlemen beat the measure, all out of time, with their forefingers, and reflected upon the excellence of the lately imbibed champagne.

All at once Sir John fainted again; at least he turned pale, put his hand to his heart, and dropped his head. Then followed a gradual melting-away of the guests, secretly glad to get off, and still gladder to think that *this* time the dinner had been eaten. And when the house was clear of strangers, Sir John recovered, and with a promptitude which to a suspicious mind might have been suggestive.

For now as he rose and announced that he was going at once to bed, he did not look so much ill as anxious. At least, so it struck Gertrude, who was watching him. His eyes had a new expression, sullen, hunted, and his manner was almost savage, as he requested some brandy might be given to him.

It was brought, and water with it. Sir John poured out a wine-glass full, and then to the astonishment of everybody, he drained it neat. No one had ever seen him do such a thing before; for he was singularly temperate. After this he turned away without saying "good night"; slowly but steadily mounted the stairs to his dressing-room alone, and locked himself in.

Gertrude was about to follow his example, when she was confronted by the respectful figure of the butler.

"If you please, my lady, this letter arrived by the evening-post, but in the confusion before dinner about Sir John's illness, Parkins forgot to give it to you."

Fresh food, this, for observation on the part of Mrs. Hatherley and Flossie. They both strained their eyes diligently; and were presently elated by seeing the envelope slip unnoticed from Gertrude's grasp, and flutter along the folds of her dress to the floor. Flossie, under pretence of shutting the window, rose and dexterously kicked the paper under a table, Gertrude meanwhile being so absorbed in the letter as to be unconscious of all movement. On concluding she looked about for the envelope, Flossie very officiously helping her; so officiously indeed that Gertrude lost patience with her fussiness, and exclaimed:

"Oh! it's no matter," wished her a curt "Good-night," and in her turn disappeared up stairs.

She had hardly vanished through the drawing-room door, when Flossie furtively, but triumphantly, exhibited the captured envelope. But the servants coming in to put out the lights and shut up, Mrs. Hatherley made her a sign to be careful, and only allowed her to

speak when in the haven of her bedroom. Then indeed was the innocent-looking cover produced and eagerly scrutinised.

"The post-mark is Harwich," said Florence, "Whom *can* she know there?"

"And the handwriting is a man's," added Mrs. Hatherley. *Whose* can it be? The envelope, however, furnished no fuller information, nor suggestion for further comment.

But hatred is imaginative and eloquent; and the two women consequently found so much to say that it was long past midnight before they separated. Flossie's door having accidentally remained ajar, Mrs. Hatherley passed through it without any noise, for the hour was late. What was it then that made her pause on the threshold, peer cautiously, with bated breath, for a moment, then slip out stealthily, without even a word to her child? Through the darkness of the corridor a light had flashed, the light of a lamp held by Gertrude. Very softly and carefully Lady Hatherley had stepped out of her own bedroom door, and now was gliding, white and spectre-like, down the broad, silent and shadow-wrapt staircase.

Not less quietly, not less ghost-like, did Mrs. Hatherley follow her. With a beating heart, however, for might she not at any moment be discovered? It really was a perilous undertaking, for the staircase had no convenient nooks, or dark turnings, where the pursuer might flatten herself against the wall and be invisible to the eyes of the pursued. It made the fourth side of the wide quadrangle, surrounded on the other three with a corridor, into which all the bedchambers and other rooms of the first floor opened. At a certain point it merged momentarily into a wide landing, and then struck downwards in one straight broad flight.

Gertrude, swift and white as a dove, has reached the landing and flashed, phantom-like, past the tall mirror let into the wall there. Mrs. Hatherley, noiseless as a dream in her shoes of felt, grey in her wraps as the shade of a friar, has followed, and in her turn been transiently, but more indistinctly, reflected in the glass. The landing creaks beneath her tread; she cowers breathless; and Gertrude, her foot on the lowest step, half turns to look.

At this moment a door on the ground floor flies open with a crash, and Mrs. Hatherley's nerves are so excited that she has much ado not to shriek. It was, however, "the wind and nothing more," although it has done her one good turn, for it has blown out the lamp held aloft by Lady Hatherley, and plunged all things in darkness. Gertrude utters a low-toned exclamation of annoyance; the elder woman stops short, holding her breath and side, fearful lest her heart-beats should betray her. Gertrude listens apparently for a moment, then gropes her way along the hall. She has remembered that on the library table are matches, and the library is her destination. She leaves the door open so that the starlight, faintly shining through one or two windows in the corridor above, may guide her a

little, and searches warily for the matches. Unperceived by her, Mrs. Hatherley has also slipped in to the library, and is even now crouching in the friendly shade of a deep bookcase. As Gertrude has her back to her, she counts on escape from detection. Lady Hatherley has found the matches and strikes one; then endeavours to re-light the lamp; but the chimney is too hot; it burns her delicate fingers, and she desists from the attempt. She finds a taper, set in a little brass candlestick, and lights that. Then she turns, surveys the room with the help of this flickering, tiny flame; approaches the door, closes and locks it.

That was the worst moment of all for the watcher. She stood squeezing herself into nothing against the side of the bookcase; hardly daring for an instant even to shoot out her slender head, and white, tense face, set with two burning eyes, that gleamed like a wild-cat's in the shadow of forest leaves.

The next thing Gertrude did was to produce a jingling bunch of keys; Sir John's keys evidently, for she walked to the bureau and unlocked it.

Mrs. Hatherley's blood ran cold at sight of the audacity. And how could she have obtained possession of the keys? It was known that her husband—ever since the loss of the Psalter especially—always slept with them under his pillow. Through the Creole's excited brain galloped all kinds of fantastic ideas. Perhaps this vile young woman had drugged Sir John: or—even poisoned him? Oh, if she had! Mrs Hatherley very nearly put her hands together—to petition some unknown power of darkness for such a consummation, so strong in her at this moment was hatred, so deadened was civilised conscience.

Gertrude, meanwhile, all unconscious of the Witch's Sabbath Dance of unnameable thoughts whirling madly within twenty paces of her, was quietly, but not slowly, turning over Sir John's most secret papers. Clearly she was looking for something, which as clearly she could not find.

Every now and again she gave a weary sigh of disappointment; more often it was a little exclamation, apparently of surprised dismay. She seemed to be making a series of discoveries. What could they be? Mrs. Hatherley's thin fingers clenched themselves involuntarily, and tugged at the folds of her dressing-gown in a very excess of nervous impatience. If she could but know the secret—know it also to be damning to her rival—then spring upon her, and wrest it from her, and expose her! But, no. She must wait and watch, and have patience; when patience there was none in her soul. She must grow every moment more numbed with cold and sicken with hope deferred, while the library clock ticked the minutes with a maddening calm, and the chilliness of the coming dawn crept slowly through the silent house.

All at once Gertrude took to tapping the inside of the bureau, and

shaking, one after another, its numberless little drawers. Every instant she repeated this surprising manœuvre with more and more determination, as of a person waxing unendurably impatient. Another shake—another tap. Mrs. Hatherley's feet took to dancing of their own accord, and she had great work to keep down the gurgle of excitement that would come up in her throat, and threaten to choke if not to betray her.

Then suddenly, just as she thought she must suffocate, she heard Gertrude give a cry of exultation, hastily extract a bundle of papers and hold them to the light. Presently, to Mrs. Hatherley's indignation, she separated one paper from the rest, and pocketed it. Then she fell to perusing another; but hardly had she begun, when a second exclamation was wrung from her, this time of amazement. Apparently she could not believe her eyes; for, holding the paper away from her and close against the now dying flame of the spent taper, she began to read it a second time.

And by this time Mrs. Hatherley, noiselessly emerging, cautiously gliding along the thick carpet, had crept up close behind her—closer—closer; and now, stretching out her eager head, was reading, unnoticed, over her shoulder. Then, as she, too, grasped the written meaning, she, too, gave a shout of triumph; and as Gertrude, startled, turned upon her, the taper flared up in one concluding splutter and went out. The Creole seized her enemy's wrist, and with it the paper; and in the darkness there began a crazy struggle.

"Let me go!" raved Gertrude, panting. "Are you mad?"

"Mad?" cried Mrs. Hatherley. "Yes; mad with joy—mad with triumph! My boy—my boy! Ah!"

This final shriek was wrung from her by Gertrude's escape.

With one strenuous effort, the latter freed herself; brought down, with compromising noise, two chairs and a heap of books; was again half-caught, again eluded the outstretched hands; and, groping wildly for the door, unlocked it and rushed out. Rushed, but not unpursued; for Mrs. Hatherley, shedding shawls as she went, was on her traces. And not undiscovered; for as she burst into the hall, two lamps simultaneously illumined the scene, and Mark, in his dressing-gown, appeared from the upper regions, while the butler, in his shirt-sleeves, emerged from the lower.

(To be continued.)

A GIRL'S FOLLY.

A SMALL, superior cottage of bright-red brick, sweet-scented woodbine trailing over its rustic porch, a green lawn before it surrounded by flowers, and a charming country landscape spreading out in the distance. Inside, in its small but very pretty parlour, on the red table-cover waited the tea-tray with its cups and saucers. The window stood open to the still, warm autumn air, and the French porcelain clock on the mantel-piece was striking five.

A slender girl of some twenty years came in. She was very lovely. But her light-blue eyes bore a sort of weary, or discontented look, and her bright brown hair was somewhat ruffled. She wore a print washing dress of black and white, neither very smooth nor very fresh, and a lace neck-collar fastened with a bow of black ribbon. Glancing round the room and seeing nobody in it, she went to the open window, stood there in a deep reverie, and then leaned out to pick a rose. Its thorns pricked her delicate fingers, and she let it fall with a pettish exclamation.

Mrs. Reece came in next. A middle-aged, faded woman of care, in a small widow's cap and neat black gown. She looked flushed and fatigued.

"Have you made the tea, Alison?"

"No, mamma."

"Oh, but you might have made it! I wish you would, child! I am very tired."

Alison turned from the window, brought the tea-caddy from a side-table, and put two caddy-spoonfuls of tea into the metal teapot. Then she carried it out to the boiling water in the kitchen, and brought it in filled. On days dedicated to some special household work, the young servant had to be spared as much as possible. This was ironing-day, and Mrs. Reece had stood at the board herself, ironing what they called the fine things, which meant laces and muslins, and helping generally. She was not strong, and a little work tired her. But she sat down to pour out the tea as usual, Alison taking a seat which faced the window.

"Why have you not changed your frock this afternoon?" exclaimed Mrs. Reece, suddenly noticing that her daughter wore the cotton she had put on in the morning. And it may as well be stated that at that time, many years ago now, the dresses worn by young ladies, whether of cotton or silk, were universally called "frocks."

"Oh, I don't know," carelessly replied Alison. "It does not matter."

"Did you forget that Thomas Watkyn was coming?"

"Not at all," said Alison, in a slightly contemptuous tone, her fair face flushing rosy red, and her blue eyes roving outwards to the distant green meadows, to the sheaves of the golden corn, and to the already changing tints of the foliage. "I'm sure the frock is good enough for Thomas Watkyn! And I don't see why he need be dancing to our house so often, mamma."

"Alison, be silent. "You are behaving ill, and you know it."

"I am very sorry you should think so, mother. I do not wish to behave ill to you."

"That is behaving ill—saying those last words; because you know well that I did not mean you were behaving ill to me, but to Thomas Watkyn."

Alison Reece pouted her cherry lips, and eat a whole slice of thin bread-and-butter before replying.

"Mamma, how particular you are!"

"I never thought you could behave so. Six months ago, you would not have believed it yourself."

"Would you please let me have a little more milk in my tea?"

"You treat Thomas Watkyn outrageously," continued Mrs. Reece, as she passed the milk-jug. "One day you smile on him, draw him on—yes, you do, Alison; don't interrupt me—and the next day you will hardly speak to him a pleasant word. But he is worth more than that other; that foolish Vavasour, with whom you have been flirting lately."

"Worth more!" retorted Alison, resenting these charges, which she knew were all true, and having no other answer at hand.

"Yes; infinitely more. Compare a dandy-fop like Vavasour with Thomas Watkyn! Alison, you must alter your behaviour. You are engaged to young Watkyn, and ——"

"There was no engagement," interrupted Alison.

"It is equivalent to one. He comes here openly to court you; you have until lately responded to it. Why! don't you see that he worships the very ground you tread on?"

A pretty blush and a conscious smile illumined the girl's face.

"I say things must not go on as they are going," repeated Mrs. Reece. "Either tell Thomas that you cannot marry him, and beg him not to come here; or else make up your mind to do so and cease your silly flirtation with the other.

"It is not a silly flirtation," angrily replied Alison.

"Indeed I see not what else it can be."

"I don't flirt; he does not flirt. He calls here sometimes, and we talk a little; and—and—I'm sure there's nothing in that to make a fuss about."

"And how often do you meet him when you are out!—and how often do I see him strolling with you about yonder fields! Alison, take care that in trying to grasp the shadow you do not lose the substance."

"What substance?" asked the young lady innocently.

"Thomas Watkyn. A union with him would be a very substantial one indeed; a thoroughly good settlement in life for you. Mr. Vavasour at best (looking at him in this light) is but a shadow. These aristocratic, flirting fops rarely have marriage in their heads. The amusement of the moment; the talking sentimental nonsense with a silly girl: that is all they look after.—Will you take another cup of tea?"

"Oh no, thank you. This lecture is as good as ten cups of tea."

"Then ring the bell."

Patty, the young servant, came in and carried away the tea-tray. Mrs. Reece went upstairs to put away the clothes ironed that day, and Miss Reece went back to the open window, leaned against its side-frame, and fell into a reverie.

She had a pretty good notion herself that matters would not go on much longer; Thomas Watkyn would not let them. More than once he had said to her a few words; and she had laughed them off. He was a fine man, and a good man, and a well-educated man for those days; but he was a farmer. Alison had thought herself fortunate that he should choose her, for she was not of much account in the world, and could say with the milkmaid in the old song, My face is my fortune: and if she was not desperately in love with him, she liked him very much, esteemed and respected him.

But a stranger made his appearance in the place, one Reginald Vavasour: who had come to read with the clergyman, previous to passing some examination. A high-bred man of good family, there could be no doubt of that, and a man of fascinating manners, given to take the female heart by storm. He had accidentally made the acquaintance of pretty Alison Reece, had talked a great deal of lazy nonsense to her for his own amusement, just to pass the time away during the intervals of his attendance in the Reverend Mr. Tarbey's study; and Alison was supremely fascinated. Beside that slender young aristocrat, whose clothes were of perfect cut, and whose easy manners (not to say insolent) were as perfect as his clothes, whose very drawl betrayed his conscious superiority to men of the rustic locality, no matter what their standing might be, what could plain unpretending Thomas Watkyn be in Alison's sight? Nobody.

Yet he was good-looking in his way, this Thomas Watkyn. A well-grown, well-made, fine man, beside whom the other looked like a boy, with a calm, sensible face, and quiet, unobtrusive ways. But again — who could admire a homely face, its steady, thoughtful, kindly eyes, and its brown, old-fashioned whiskers, when there was another face over the next field, whose dark orbs were of a flashing brilliance, and whose curled-out black moustache was killing? Not silly, inexperienced, vain Alison Reece.

Leaning against the window-frame, Alison watched a tall straight figure coming across the meadows, and her brow went into a scowl. It was Thomas Watkyn: and she wondered what brought him so

early this evening; she wished he would stay away for good. Or, if not for good—for something pricked her heart and conscience there—at least for a few weeks. She did care for Tom, and she knew it, and she supposed she should marry him sometime. Unless indeed—sometimes Alison dreamed dreams of Mr. Vavasour appearing some fine morning to carry her off in a carriage and four, the horses and postboys displaying white favours. She had no true love for Mr. Vavasour; but she was very pretty, with all a pretty girl's vanity, and his admiration of her was just so much subtle incense.

A thought of vexation crossed her mind, as Mr. Watkyn came in at the gate, that she had not changed her frock as usual. Some kind of perverse obstinacy had caused her not to do it, *because* she knew that he would be there that evening and that Mr. Vavasour would not. She walked out to the rustic porch awaiting his approach: and she grew more vexed still as she saw his keen, honest grey eyes scanning the untidy dress in mute surprise.

"Good evening, Alison."

"Good evening," she replied, meeting his offered hand. "You are come early."

"I must leave early. I have but a few minutes to give you."

"It was scarcely necessary to come at all, was it?"

"I knew you would be expecting me."

"Oh, not particularly!" replied Miss Alison, tossing her curls back to express indifference.

"But I will come to-morrow, Alison, about this hour. I want to have some conversation with you, and ——"

"To lecture me, pray?"

"No; that is over. However, I will not enter upon it now. My uncle came in this afternoon from Barceter, and as he leaves us again early to-morrow, I must not be away long this evening."

"Your father is at home, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes."

"You were not here yesterday evening?"

"I stayed away purposely. Would you have cared to see me had I come?"

"I can't say whether I should or not. You have not been very pleasant with me of late, Tom."

"Not as I once was, perhaps: how can I be? But I do not think I have made myself unpleasant."

"We never hardly get a laugh from you. You have grown graver than a judge."

"Have I not had cause?"

"Cause!" she lightly repeated. "What cause?"

"Alison, this pretence of indifference, does not become you. I say that I do not care to enter upon matters now. If I did, I might recal the doings of only the last two days to your memory, and ask you whether they have or have not held cause."

"Well?"

"Take Sunday. In the morning you scarcely *looked* at me as we came out of church; in the afternoon, when I would have joined you and walked home with you, you threw me over with supreme scorn and went away side by side with Vavasour. And in the evening you were pacing the meadows with him."

"It was no harm. He was not eating me."

"Take yesterday," continued Mr. Watkyn, his face, his gentle voice full of the deepest pain. He had holiday, it must be supposed, from his studies, and he and you were roaming about together nearly the whole of the live-long day."

"And he came in and took a cup of tea with me and my mother afterwards," answered Alison with saucy, laughing insolence. "Mamma thinks him charming."

"He is an idle, heartless ——"

"Well, why do you stop?"

"I was going to say—vagabond. And in one sense he is."

"He comes of a race who can afford to be idle. *He* does not have to till the ground by the sweat of his brow. He was born with his bread-and-cheese provided for him."

"With a silver spoon in his mouth," added Mr. Watkyn, affecting a lightness he did not feel, for her contemptuous tone tried him. "Well, good evening, Alison."

"Oh, good evening, if you are going."

He stood looking at her, and their eyes met. Alison caught the shadow of pain in his, and in her own there arose a remorseful pity: she had the grace to feel ashamed of herself. Her lips broke into a tender smile; a pink flush shone in her dimpled cheeks.

"You are very silly, Thomas."

"Am I?" he returned, holding her hand lovingly in his. "Fare you well until to-morrow evening, my dearest."

"There! Your dearest! And just now you were ready to call me hard names!"

"Until to-morrow," he repeated with a smile, as he quitted her.

Alison got a perfumed note the next morning from Mr. Vavasour: gilt-edged paper, crest on the seal. It told her that he was to be so "gloriously busy" that day, he feared he should not have time to call at the cottage; but would she meet him in the willow walk at dusk. And it ended: "Your faithful Reginald Vavasour."

The vain expectations of Miss Alison Reece bubbled up aloft; her face and heart were alike in a glow. "Your faithful Reginald Vavasour!" she repeated to herself. "It *must* mean that he intends to be faithful to me for life. And what a grand, beautiful name Reginald Vavasour is! Compare it with the mean old commonplace one Tom Watkyn!"

Tea was over, and Alison, all in readiness for the interview with

Mr. Watkyn, was steeling her heart against it and against him who was coming to hold it with her. She had changed her frock to-day, and wore a fresh, bright coloured muslin, blue ribbons at the neck and wrists, and a blue knot in her hair.

She waited impatiently; she wanted the interview over and done with, that she might be off to keep that other with Mr. Vavasour. But Thomas was late.

Pacing the garden-path in the rays of the fading sun, she stood looking over the little iron entrance gate, her blue eyes roving hither and thither in search of one whom she could not yet see. Unconsciously she broke out into the verse of a homely song.

"Oh dear, what can the matter be,
Dear, dear, what can the matter be,
Oh dear, what can the matter be,
Johnny's so long at the fair!
He promised to buy me a bunch of sweet posies,
A bunch of green mosses, a bunch of pink roses,
He promised to bring me a knot of blue ribbons
To tie up my bonny brown hair."

The hum of the last words was dying away on the air when the well-known form of Thomas Watkyn came into view. He wore his usual dark-blue evening frock coat and quiet waistcoat: he dressed well always when his day's work was over, but not in the fashionable attire of fashionable Mr. Vavasour.

"Good evening, Alison," he said, as he reached the gate. "What a lovely evening it is!"

Removing his hat, he gazed up at the sapphire sky, action and countenance alike full of reverence: and Alison, who had not been taking any particular notice before, looked around her, her face softening at the splendour of nature's glory.

"What a glorious sunset!" he continued, his voice taking a hushed tone. "Glorious, glorious!"

"How solemnly you speak, Thomas!"

"I am feeling solemn. I have been feeling so ever since I came out; but I don't know why. Unless it is that heavenly scene that's making me so."

"It is very grand," she said, fixing her eyes on the bank of golden clouds in the western sky, where the sun was just slipping down behind the purple hill-tops in the distance, like a ball of ruby flame. Tiny bits of foam-like clouds flecked the limpid blue of the heavens, a warm, golden glow gilded the earth, freshened and vivified with a past shower. The musical twitter of birds going to their rest filled the woodlands; and, as Alison looked, a strange feeling of awe stole into her heart, for the glory that lay around seemed more than earthly.

"There are moments," he said, in a dreamy manner, "when I

fancy these sunsets must be given to us as a faint reflex—though I suppose that's the wrong word—of what we shall find in Heaven; given to us by God to turn our thoughts and hopes towards it. Oh, Alison! it is more than beautiful!"

The ruby flame was changing to a soft and brilliant rose-colour, inexpressibly lovely. It was indeed a rather remarkable sunset; one not often vouchsafed to human eye.

"You make quite sure of going to Heaven, Tom!" she exclaimed, in a flippant tone. For she wanted to ward off all serious conversation, lest he should begin to lecture.

Thomas Watkyn turned his eyes upon her, surprise, if not reproof, in their depths. "I hope I am," he answered, "under God."

"Young people do not often think of these things."

"The young die as well as the old, child; remember that."

"Won't you come in, Thomas?" she asked, in a softened voice, as they presently strolled up the path, and he halted in the porch.

"Not this evening, Alison. What I have to say I will say here."

Alison flushed to the roots of her wavy hair, and moved a step or two away from him.

"Look!" she cried, pointing to the blazing western sky, "that bank of golden clouds is changing to crimson now."

He went forward, for he had already sat down, and looked again at the gorgeous panorama.

"Yes, it is, as I say, a glorious sunset. We may never see another like it on this side of eternity," he added, dreamily, seeming to lose himself in solemn thoughts.

Alison laughed—her little musical laugh that had often set his pulses beating wildly. "You are always looking at the dark side of things, Tom. I hope we shall yet watch many a sunset together.

"Do you really, Alison?"

"Why, of course we must see the sunsets if we live," she returned, in a hard, matter-of-fact tone. "As we are neighbours we may likely see some of them in company."

"That was all, was it! Sit down, Alison."

"I prefer to stand."

Nevertheless Mr. Watkyn drew her somewhat peremptorily to his side and made her sit down on the bench. "What I want to say to you, Alison, is about young Vavasour."

"Oh indeed!" she retorted.

"I do not like to see you make yourself a simpleton with that man; I will not see it: for, if you continue to do it, I shall say farewell to you, and not trouble this side of our grounds again."

Alison's face turned white; a habit it had when she was startled or very angry; and the remaining softness faded out of her heart, just as the golden glow was beginning to fade out of the western sky.

"Simpleton!—do you call me? Thank you."

"It is nothing less," he returned. "A short while, and this man will be leaving the place for ever; leaving you. You will feel vexed then, Alison, at having made your intimacy with him so conspicuous."

"He will not be leaving," she retorted. "When he does leave, it will only be to come back again."

Her companion shook his head. "No, that is not likely. Yesterday Mr. Tarbey called at the farm: in talking with my father, he mentioned incidentally that young Vavasour was only to be with him this one term. The fellow may not have anything especially bad in him; I should not wish to imply that; but he is idle and heartless, and, in pretending to make love to you, Alison, he is but amusing himself and fooling you."

"How dare you say he is making love to me?"

"I say he is pretending to do it. Alison, you must know it to be so—if you would but speak the candid truth."

"Very well, then! Pray what if he is?"

"Only this: That you cannot continue to listen to him and keep me in your train. It must be one or the other of us, Alison, from this night. You must choose between us."

"Then I choose him," she said, wrathfully rising.

"Do you *mean* it?" asked Mr. Watkyn, rising in his turn.

The girl did not answer. Her chest was heaving with agitation; Thomas Watkyn's grey eyes took a tender light as they gazed at the pretty, changing, uncertain face.

"Alison," he said, and his voice was wonderfully considerate, "I have known you from childhood; I have loved you all your life. Twelve months ago there arose an understanding between us that you would he my wife: until recently I never supposed that you could have any other thought. But you have filled my breast with cruel fears; *tortured* it, my dear; and I cannot bear them longer. You must be to me what you used to be, or give me up."

Alison's eyes grew sullen. Why could not this Tom Watkyn let her alone? She did not altogether want to break with him. What harm was she doing, in talking to Reginald Vavasour? Reginald was ten times the gentleman that he was!—and his voice had a sweet, soft lisp!—and he wore a diamond ring on his white hand!

"Oh, my dear—my best and dearest—give up this folly! Let things be with us as they used to be! *Don't* you care for me?"

"No," she replied to him, in her cross and contrary spirit; conscious all the while of a latent wish that Mr. Vavasourhad been buried in the sea before coming to disturb the peace. "*No!*"

"Then you decline to marry me, Alison? You have not loved me as I love you?"

The sad, passionate fervour nearly scared her breath away: the heartfelt sorrow, all too plain, touched her with a qualm. But she was in an obstinate mood.

"Mr. Vavasour does not hurt you. I wonder you should concern yourself with him!"

"No trifling," sternly spoke Thomas Watkyn. "I tell you it must be him or me."

She would not answer.

"Will you give him up, Alison, from this night?" he pleaded.

"No." What inward spirit of evil prompted her to speak that short, sullen word, Alison never knew. But it was spoken.

"Very well."

For long afterwards, the pain and pathos in those two short words haunted her like a wail from the grave. Thomas stood before her, calm and self-possessed.

"I will never trouble you again, Alison," he said, quietly. "Will you kiss me once—ere we say farewell for ever?"

She felt awed at the sternness, the reality that was stealing upon their interview, and trembled at the thought of losing him. But she did not believe it would come to that in the end, and she was too proud and wilful to take back her answer unsolicited.

With a playful air, half saucy, half defiant, she shyly held up slightly her red lips, while he kissed her with a long, lingering kiss, such as we give the dead.

"Good-bye," he said, huskily. He strode away, leaving her standing in the glow of the sunset, a wild, scared look on her young face.

"He will turn back," she whispered to herself. "Surely—surely! —for I could not bear to lose him." But Mr. Watkyn went straight on to the gate.

"Thomas!" she called out. "Thomas!"

He turned then. "What is it?" he asked.

Perhaps she had it in her mind to humble herself to him—who knows? She did nothing of the kind. A moment's pause, possibly of indecision; and then she produced a note from within the folds of her frock.

"May I ask you to do me a little favour, Thomas—for the last time?"

"What is it," he repeated.

"If you would not very much mind going home by the hill, and would leave this note at Miss Ford's. I particularly wish her to have it this evening."

He paused for an instant, not replying. She went on hurriedly.

"I see that it is disagreeable to you. I have offended you too much."

"Not that," he answered, holding out his hand for the note. "But I can hardly spare the time for the long way this evening, as I have to call at Killick's for my father. However—" he said no more, but took the note.

"Good-bye, Thomas."

"Good-bye for aye. God be with you!"

"What a solemn mood he is in, the stupid fellow!" commented she. "But I *am* glad he took the note! I shall be safe now."

Miss Alison Reece was a clever young lady. The direct and near way to Mr. Watkyn's home would lead him past the willow walk. She had devised this impromptu note to her dressmaker in the afternoon to prevent his taking that usual route. Had he seen young Vavasour cooling his heels within the precincts of the willow walk he would inevitably suspect he was waiting to keep a lover's tryst.

Alison leaned over the gate and watched him as he walked away, watched him take the lane that led to the route she had wished, and disappear. She stood there until the gold in the clouds had changed to crimson, the crimson to purple, that spread itself like a royal mantle over the western hills. White mists began to settle on the brooks that but a moment ago had reflected the gorgeous rays of the setting sun. Somehow it seemed to make her shiver, and she crept up to her own room with a strange sense of loss at her heart.

Mrs. Reece had gone out after tea to sit with a sick neighbour, and Alison devoutly hoped she would not be coming home yet, or there might be a difficulty in getting away to keep her appointment. It was nearly time to be starting; at least, she might as well go at once, and then she should be safe from her mother. Putting on her hat, she ran downstairs, and opened the kitchen door.

"Patty, if mamma comes in and asks for me, tell her I am only strolling about a bit this lovely evening. I shall be in directly."

But the loveliness of the evening had gone. Somewhat to Alison's surprise, the white mist had increased so greatly as to obscure everything but itself. "How quickly it has come on!" she exclaimed.

Mr. Vavasour was waiting for her, and they paced for a few minutes the willow walk together. But for a very few: the young man said he was pressed for time: he had "heaps" of packing to do, not having touched it yet, and he was going away in the morning.

"Going away!" exclaimed Alison.

"Yes—and be shot to it!" said he. "I got a letter this morning recalling me home. My mother's ill, is ordered to Nice, and she wants me to accompany her. Fate is cruel to us, dear Miss Reece."

"But—you will be coming back here!" cried the startled Alison.

"I'm sure I don't know whether I shall be coming back here ever—or whether I may find myself banished to the remotest regions of Siberia," drawled the dandy, twirling one end of his moustache. "Nothing seems certain in this sublunary world, except uncertain changes. Old Tarbey was quite knocked down with the news. I wrote to ask you to be good enough to meet me here, knowing I should not have a minute all day to get down to your place—to tell you of it, and to say good-bye."

There was a matter-of-course carelessness in his voice and manner that grated terrib'y on Alison; her pride rose to the surface.

"Well, I suppose you will be glad to go, Mr. Vavasour!"

"Glad? Ah, I don't know about that. Glad to escape Tarbey and his grinding: immensely sorry to leave *you*. Wish you were going with me!"

"You are too kind. I will not hinder you any longer; and I must be going home too. Good-night: and good-bye."

Mr. Vavasour took her hand and held it. "Good-bye, dear Miss Reece," he said. "I shall often think of you, and of our pleasant meetings. You will let me take a farewell kiss."

He bent his face to hers. "How dare you, sir?" she exclaimed, starting back from him. "Kiss me, indeed! and here! Until this night I had taken you for a gentleman."

"I beg your pardon," he said, laughingly; "I meant no harm. Halloa, what a mist it is!" he broke off, as they came to the end of the walk, and the open field beyond it. "One can hardly see ten yards before one. I must see you home."

"No, no, no!" cried Alison, vehemently. "I know my way perfectly—better than you do—I shall go alone. You will have enough to do to get back to the Parsonage; take care you don't miss the path. Good-bye, sir."

She flew from him across the field and was lost in the mist. He took the opposite path.

"And so that's the last of Reginald Vavasour," thought Alison. "It serves me right. What a simpleton I have been!—as Thomas called me.—How I hope mamma has not got home!"

The mist seemed to grow more dense every minute, and Alison really found her own gate with some difficulty. Her bonnet had not been put away above a minute when Mrs. Reece came in.

"Such a dreadful mist!" she observed to Alison; "I don't think I ever saw such a one. It came on suddenly after the most lovely sunset. Quite a remarkable sunset. I hope you noticed it, child."

"Thomas Watkyn took care I should do that, mamma. He called it divine."

"Indeed it looked nothing less," replied Mrs. Reece. "I am glad you have had Thomas here."

Alison complained of a headache and went up to bed; she was afraid of being questioned. If the evening could come over again, she would treat Thomas Watkyn differently. She felt a little ashamed of herself; she felt a little uneasy.

"But I will make it up to him," she sighed, as she laid her head upon her pillow. "He will be sure to let me: he is so good, and he loves me so truly."

Alison awoke betimes, and to a vague sense of uneasiness. It was a fine morning, the mist all cleared away. As she stood at the window, the rising sun, lifting himself majestically in the east, tinted her cheeks with a rose-red flush and threw down on the green meadows

floods of a golden glowing light, while the songs of thrushes and larks broke out from every hedge and coppice.

"We must make the damson jam to-day," observed Mrs. Reece to her, as they rose from breakfast. "And if you would only wash up these breakfast things, Alison, while Patty goes about her other work, I should soon have the kitchen table clear and might begin it."

"Oh, very well," answered the girl, cheerfully. For she had been taking herself to task for her past behaviour, and meant to turn over a new leaf. "You shall have the table clear directly, mother."

She was busy in the kitchen, when she heard her mother open the front door and some one come in. "It is that chattering Mrs. Bennett!" thought she, as she dried the teaspoons.

"Alison! come here," called her mother, in a quick voice.

She went to the parlour just as she was: her sleeves turned back at the wrists, a large brown-holland apron on. Very pretty she looked with it all. But it was not Mrs. Bennett who sat with her mother; it was a venerable, white-haired old gentleman — Mr. Watkyn the elder.

"I am come to ask about Thomas," said he. "I believe he came here last night, Miss Alison: at what time did he leave you?"

A prevision struck her, with a sort of terror, that something was wrong. "He left quite early," she faltered.

"Well, he has never come home."

"Not come home!" she said, with a whitening face.

"I sat up till one o'clock, and then I thought the mist must have kept him, that he had stayed at some friend's house; I knew not what to think; and that he would be home the first thing this morning. But we have not seen him, and I cannot hear of him."

Mrs. Reece was impressed with the frightened, guilty look that Alison could not keep out of her countenance, and began to feel uneasy. "Cannot you tell what time it was when he left you?" she demanded, sternly.

"It was before dusk; it was just after sunset, before the mist came on. It must have been near seven o'clock."

"Which road did he take?" pursued Mrs. Reece. And very reluctantly Alison answered, for she foresaw it would bring on further questioning.

"The long way—round by the hill."

"Round by the hill!" echoed Mr. Watkyn, in alarmed surprise. "Why did he take that way?"

Alison flushed and paled alternately: her lips were trembling. The fear creeping upon her was—that he and young Vavasour had met and quarrelled. Perhaps fought—and injured one another fatally. In these dread moments of suspense the mind is apt to conjure up far-fetched and unlikely thoughts.

"I asked him to go round that way," she replied, in a timid tone; I wanted him to leave a note for me at the dressmaker's."

Old Mr. Watkyn sank into a chair, putting up his hands before his troubled face. "I see it all!" he breathed, faintly: "he must have fallen down the Scar."

Alison uttered a scream of horror.

"Deceived by the mist, he must have walked too near its edge," continued the old man. "Heaven grant that it may not be so! but—I fear it. Was he mad?—to attempt to cross the plateau on such a night!"

Catching up his hat, Mr. Watkyn went out swiftly. Mrs. Reece grasped her daughter's hands. They were icy-cold.

"Alison, what passed between you and Thomas last night?"

"Don't ask me, mother! Let me follow Mr. Watkyn; I cannot rest indoors. Oh, it cannot, cannot be as he fears!"

"Not one step until you tell me what passed," said the mother firmly. "There's more in all this than meets the eye."

"He asked me to—give up talking to Mr. Vavasour."

"And you refused. Well?"

"He told me I must choose between them," continued Alison, bursting into tears. "Oh, mother, it was all folly, all my temper; he could not see that, and when he went away, he said he went for good."

Mrs. Reece drew in her thin lips sternly. She stood thinking.

"And what does it mean about your giving him a note for the dressmaker? I do not understand. You had nothing to write about."

The girl got her hands free and flung them before her face to deaden the sobs. But Mrs. Reece was a resolute mother at times, and she extorted the confession. Alison had improvised the note, and sent Thomas round the long way to deliver it, and so keep him from passing by the Willow walk.

"Oh, child, child!" moaned the dismayed woman. "If he has indeed fallen over the Scar, it is you who will have given him his death."

And it proved to be so. In taking the two mile round between the cottage and the farm, a high and perpendicular precipice, called the Scar, had to be passed. The table-land, or plateau, on the top was wide and a perfectly safe road by daylight, since a traveller could keep as far from the unprotected edge as he pleased. But on a dark night or in a thick fog it was most dangerous. Deceived by the mist of the previous night, Thomas Watkyn must have drawn near the edge unwittingly, and fallen over it. There he lay, on the sharp rocks, when the poor father and others went to look for him, his death-like face upturned to the blue sky.

"Speak to me, Thomas! speak to me!" wailed Alison, quite beside herself with remorse and grief, as she knelt by him, wringing her hands. "Oh, Thomas, speak to me! I loved you all the while."

But Thomas neither spoke nor moved. The voice that had nothing but tender words for her was silenced now; the heart she had so grieved might never beat in joy or sorrow again.

No person had seen or spoken with him after quitting her the previous night, save the dressmaker, little industrious Miss Ford. She had answered his knock herself, she related, and he put the note into her hands, saying Miss Reece had asked him to leave it in passing. "What a thick mist it is that has come on," he remarked to her in his pleasant, chatty way. "Ay, it is indeed, sir," she answered, and shut her door as he walked away.

For many weeks Alison Reece lay ill with brain fever, hovering between life and death. Some people said it was the shock that made her ill and took her senses away; others thought she must have loved the poor young man to distraction; no one, save her mother, knew it was the memory of her last interview with him, and the scheming to send him on the route that led to his accident, that had well-nigh killed her. But the young are strong in their tenacity of life, and she grew better by slow degrees.

One warm April afternoon, when the winter months had given place to spring, Alison, leaning on the arm of her mother, went to sit in the porch. She was very feeble yet. It was the first time she had sat there since that memorable evening with her ill-fated lover. There she remained, thinking and dreaming. They could not persuade her to come in, so wrapped her in a warm shawl.

Sunset came on; and was almost as beautiful, curious, perhaps, that it should be so, as the one he and she had watched together more than six months before. The brilliant beams shone like molten gold in the glowing west, the blue sky around was flecked with pink and amethyst. Alison's eyes were fixed on the lovely scene with an enraptured gaze, her lips slightly parting with emotion.

"Alison, what are you thinking of?"

"Of *him*, mother. Of his happiness. He is *living* in all that glorious beauty. I think there must have been an unconscious prevision in his mind, by what he said that evening as we watched it, that he should soon be there. Oh, mother, I wish I was going to him! I wish I could be with him to-morrow!"

The mother paused; she felt inclined to say something, but feared the agitation it might cause.

"Well, well, child, you are getting better," she presently answered.

"Yes, I do get better," sighed the girl. "I suppose it pleased God that I should."

"Time soothes all things, Alison. In time you will be strong again, and able to fulfil life's various duties with a zest. Trials are good—oh so good!—for the soul. But for meeting with them, we might never learn the way to heaven."

Alison did not answer. Her feeble hands were clasped in silent prayer, her face was lifted to the glories of the evening sky.

It was at the same sunset hour, an evening or two later, that Alison, who was picking up strength daily, strolled away to the churchyard. She wanted to look for a newly-made grave in that corner where so many of the Watkyns lay buried.

She could not see it; the same gravestones that were there before were there now; there was no fresh one.

"Perhaps they opened the old vault for him," thought Alison, as she sat down on the bench just inside the gate, for she was too weak to walk back again without a rest.

The sun was going down to-night without any loveliness; just a crimson ball, which seemed to give a red light to the atmosphere, and to light up redly the face of a pale tottering man, who was coming up to the gate by help of a stick. He halted when he reached it. Alison turned sick and faint with all manner of emotions as she gazed at him, fright being uppermost.

"Alison!"

"Thomas!"

He held out his hand; he came inside; his pale, sad face wore for her its old sweet expression.

"Oh Thomas, I thought you were dead," she burst forth, in a storm of sobs. "I came here to look for your grave! I thought I had killed you."

"They thought I was dead at first; they thought for a long while that I should die," he answered, as he sat down beside her, keeping her hand in his. "But the skilful medical men have raised me up, under God. I hope in time to be strong and well again."

"Can you ever forgive me?" she wailed; bitter, painful tears falling down her cheeks like rain. "I shall never forgive myself."

"No? Then you must atone to me, Alison, instead. Be all the more loving to me during our future lives. We must pass them together, my dear."

"Do you mean it—still?" she gasped. "Oh, Thomas! how good and true you are! If I can only be a little bit worthy of you!"

They walked home slowly, arm-in-arm. Neither could walk fast yet. Mrs. Reece came to the porch to meet them. God is full of mercy, she thought.

"I did not tell her, Thomas," she said; "she was so dreadfully low when she came out of the fever. I meant to tell her to-night."

"I have told her myself; it was best so," answered Thomas Watkyn.

THE CRUISE OF THE RESERVE SQUADRON.

By Charles W. Wood,
Author of "Through Holland," "In the Black Forest," etc.

WE passed into another world. The moon, "round as a shield," was rolling upwards in splendour, like a ball of liquid silver suspended in the dark blue sky, lighting a scene with magic beauty and softness that surely had scarcely a parallel on the earth.

Not only the present, visible charm influences the gazer. There is all its antiquity and bygone history; all the vicissitudes and dangers through which the Alhambra has passed—seared it may be, but, like the face of a veteran who has well served his country, more loved for its scars. A halo of veneration surrounds it with such an atmosphere as that wherein the pilgrim views his favourite shrine. A glow of romance and contemplation takes you back in spirit to the days of the Moors; that people rich in energy and enterprise and ambition, in refinement and good taste, in Eastern imagery and pomp and splendour. The mind is full of retrospective thought and dreamy remembrance. Events of centuries seem to crowd upon the brain and rehearse themselves in the space of a few moments and with panoramic vividness, on finding yourself within this wonderful structure, face to face with a life-haunted vision, a wish long dreamed of and at length fulfilled.

The door opened noiselessly. When it had closed upon us, the guardian spirit of the place stood exposed in the shape of an attendant, holding a lantern that shed a feeble light wherewith to guide our steps. He might have been Diogenes, and must at least have been the good genius of the place. Surely nothing evil could here found existence and a foothold?

The small corridor was in truth his local habitation. His rooms were above; a gilded cage hung in celestial regions, wherein probably he kept a sweet singing nightingale in the shape of a wife; though, as birds do not always agree in their nests, it is quite possible that she occasionally varied the laughing hours by a Wagnerian demonstration of sound. At the end of the corridor, a table held the book in which visitors are supposed to record their names—but we had nothing to do with that to-night.

The gloom enshrouding the corridor only served more clearly to define the outlines of the small arches and slender pillars, through which you gain admittance to the Court of the Myrtles, or of the Bath, or of the Blessing—as it has been indifferently called. In the corridor we were in shadow, but the court beyond was flooded with the most brilliant moonlight it is possible to conceive.

Never, if I live to be a century old (a most improbable possibility), shall I forget that first glimpse and impression as we passed out of the corridor. To begin with, we might have been in a city of the dead. Not a sound disturbed the solemn stillness. Our footsteps echoed mysteriously; our voices insensibly fell into a murmur; a few bats flew about, with the noiseless, irregular flight that endows them with a reputation that would make of them something more than birds. Turning towards the south end, we gazed upon an enchanted scene.

A gallery ran the length of the south side of the court, supported by delicate arches and peristyles that seemed too slender to bear their weight. But the actual supports of the building are cunningly placed out of sight, and thus the fairy-like character of the Alhambra is maintained throughout in an apparently mysterious manner. The dazzling moonlight so marvellously brought out the fretwork of the outside arches, with their arabesque designs, that we appeared to gaze upon an extent of minute ivory carving, too beautiful, too ethereal for human hands to have accomplished. Eight pillars supported the gallery. The moon, throwing the outer portion into vivid relief, only served to cast within the recesses a deep gloom in the highest degree solemn and impressive. Strong, vivid lights and shadows, indeed, met the eye wherever the moonbeams penetrated.

The court is 140 feet long, and 74 feet wide. Like all the courts of the Alhambra, it has no roof, and the deep blue sky, to which it is open, only adds to its charm. It is paved with pure white marble, and, in the centre is a large pond or bath, filled with gold-fish, bordered on each side by a row of myrtle bushes, kept small and well trimmed. A few orange trees were trained against the walls, right and left, and facing each other, were the small arches and slender pillars leading outwards and inwards. At the north end rose the solemn Tower of Comares, its dark reflection upon the water clearly traced in the moonlight.

In the days of its glory, the court was richly gilded and painted in many colours, and the arabesque designs of the stucco and fretwork were picked out with wonderful care and skill. The effect must have been gorgeous, yet singularly refined. Now it has faded almost to whiteness; but open to the sky, and exposed to all the elements, one marvels that the very courts themselves have not long since crumbled and disappeared as age after age rolled onwards. These designs consist of leaves and flowers delicately traced; and some of the inner walls of the halls are covered with inscriptions in Cufic and Arabian characters and texts from the Koran, repeated in endless iteration.

We passed into the Court of Lions, the principal court of the Alhambra—its centre, as it were, whence open and radiate all other courts, halls, and apartments of the palace. You may catch glimpses of it, and its celebrated fountain supported by its twelve solemn-looking lions, from a hundred different points of view; each point

possessing its distinctive feature. Arches and cloisters, distant courts and corridors, galleries and peristyles, domes and glazed roofs, walls of chaste filigree work, upper galleries lighted and lightened by arched windows; and through all, and above all, the wonderful blue southern sky and radiant southern atmosphere.

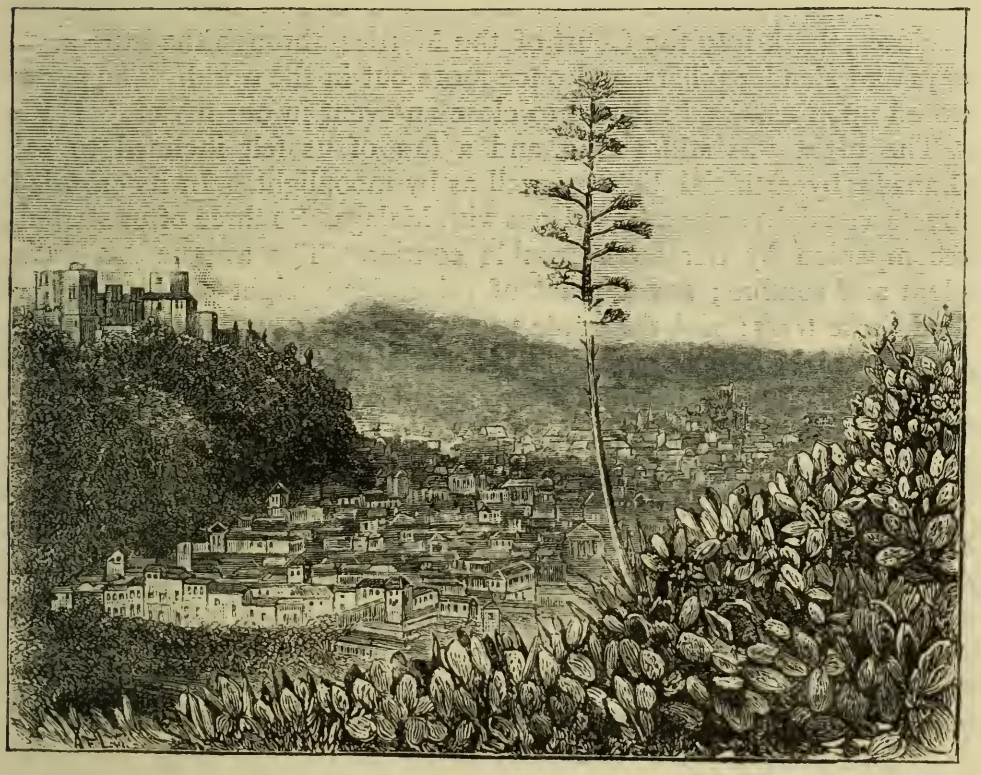
The Court of Lions was far larger and still more remarkable than the Court of the Myrtles. Here more than anywhere you may realise and contemplate the bygone majesty of the Alhambra—though it was ever distinguished for its beauty and delicate refinement rather than for the majestic. To-night, flooded by the pale moonlight, it looked of unearthly loveliness. On all sides ran a low gallery, supported by exquisite arches of open fretwork, and what, in the semi-obscurity, seemed a countless number of thin, white marble pillars. Deep shadows, thrown by these pillars and arches, chequered the pure white marble pavement, and the grim lions and alabaster fountain cast their shadows also. The small domes and roofs above the galleries, covered with highly-glazed tiles, caught the moonbeams, and gleamed as if studded with jewels. Halls and corridors beyond the court were steeped in mysterious darkness. Approaching, one could, after a time, dimly discern mysterious outlines, and cloister-like, far stretching vistas; but as Diogenes with his lantern frequently wandered one way and we another, a stumble over a marble step sometimes threatened to bring one's dream to an end, and dispel all this vivid illusion. We were not in the ordinary world, but in a spot owned and inhabited by magicians, the best and wisest people one had met in the Arabian Nights.

These lights and shadows, the obscurity of the interior, seemed to invest the Alhambra with immense proportions and unlimited space. It might have been a kingdom instead of a palace, its area reckoned by miles rather than feet; a structure wherein one might roam day after day, still exploring, still discovering. More solemn and mysterious, more beautiful and unearthly seemed to grow the place, as we walked, now pausing in the exquisite Hall of the Abencerrages, of which to-night we could not see the exquisite delicacy, though we knew its sad legend by heart, and might lean over the sunken fountain in the centre, and try to discern the red stains that the guide said had existed since the cavaliers and chiefs of that name had there been betrayed and murdered. Now and then Diogenes waved around his lantern; as when, passing into the Hall of the Ambassadors, in the Tower of Comares, he flashed a feeble glimmer, faintly revealing its fine proportions, its deep casements, the splendid decorations of the walls, the rich gilding and exquisite painting of its inlaid, cedar-wood roof. Imagination peopled it with the pomp and ceremony of old; the picturesque groups and figures of the Moors; the grave dignity of the kings as they gave audience to foreign powers and dictated terms or yielded to demands.

We passed into the little garden of Lindaraja, with its centre

fountain, its orange trees and Japanese medlars touched into life by the moonbeams. Its high walls looked gloomy and prison-like, bats wheeled their noiseless flight. Back into the palace, and guided by Diogenes, we went down into the Chamber of Secrets, where, by applying the ear to one of the angles of the wall, one heard distinctly what was said at the further end. Beyond this was a long, low vaulted room, not always shown, wherein were sculptures and figures of curious device, more mythological, perhaps, than quite orthodox.

Finally, climbing the dark staircase of a tower, we were rewarded



THE ALHAMBRA AND GRANADA.

by a scene that amazed our already bewitched senses. An immense tract of country lay spread before us, steeped in silence. The moon, still rolling upwards, threw a flood of vivid, silvery light over all. Below, like a dream-city, Granada sparkled with lamps and seemed in possession of a crowd. Immediately beneath us were the pine-clad steeps on which the Alhambra stands so nobly. On the right were the huts of the gipsies, but no sound came to-night from those dark and gloomy abodes. To our left were the courts and halls through which we had lately wandered and dreamed; while the outlines of the outer walls with their towers, enclosing the territory of the Alhambra, might be distinctly traced.

Far down, the river ran its course, and beyond the immense plain the mountains rose against the dark sky, the snows of the Sierra

Nevada gleaming in the moonlight. The scene was full of magic. Nothing broke the stillness but the sudden and occasional outringing of the silvery bell on the Torre de la Vela. The watchman was awake; the irrigators were at their work in the plains.

What we looked upon we had seen a few hours ago from that old tower. The sun was then declining, a mist was creeping up the valley like a golden tide, nature had been flushed with rosy light. Now all was changed. All was steeped in the hush and death of night, save where the southern moon warmed back to life the sleeping earth.

We left it, marvelling. Down the old stairs and through the enchanted courts, in and out of the columns and their mysterious shadows; back into the Court of the Myrtles, through the little archways and slender pillars, and once more out in the world. The portal closed upon us—and seemed to close an event in our lives.

The night was still young, and a few of us felt inclined to see Granada by artificial light as well as by moonlight. In its crowded streets we might draw comparisons with Malaga. So three of us started, accompanied by our indispensable courier. The avenue was dark, silent and sombre; any amount of brigandage might be lurking behind those trees; and the guide to animate our courage, related to us how one night he had come up this very same avenue and discovered a stranger who had been attacked by brigands, robbed and stripped. They hadn't left him a shred; not so much as a collar or a pair of boots. Thereupon Wiley had had to go up to the hotel and get a suit of clothes before the unfortunate victim could be made presentable to face the world once more. "And I firmly believe," continued our guide, "that my coming up the avenue at that moment saved the man's life. The scoundrels heard footsteps, knew not whose they were or how many there might be, and with a final crack on the head, which, happily, did no great harm, they made off with their booty—watch, money, clothes—everything he had about him."

We enjoyed this lively anecdote very much; and when the guide pointed out the exact spot where the unhappy man was nearly murdered, lingered as short a time as curiosity and politeness permitted; and felt rather glad when we had passed through Charles V.'s Gate of Græco-Tuscan architecture, and duly admired its crowning ornament—a helmet, or the arms of the town, or something of the sort—that in the strong moonlight formed itself into the head of the most grotesque old witch that ever was seen in life or on canvas. By day or by night, there was ever the likeness of a grinning old Mother Hubbard: and the most solemn old crow flying across the world must have laughed as he looked.

Down the narrow, tortuous Calle of Gomeres, out into the broad Alameda, and turning to the left, we soon reached the Zacatin, to-night crowded and noisy. Presently we came upon an assemblage of shows and booths, travelling theatres and shooting galleries, as if it were the occasion of some great fête or fair. Perhaps it was so.

How different the scene from the silence and grandeur, the solemn beauty and repose of those wonderful halls and courts of the Alhambra! Here crowds moved about; gas and torches were flaring; the ordinary occupations and vulgar amusements of life had full play. It was coming back to earth, and the things of earth with a reality that only an hour ago had seemed impossible. Yet—sad to record of human nature, so influenced by exteriors and surroundings—we enjoyed the crowd and the excitement; and whilst contenting ourselves with the outside of the seductive booths and shooting galleries, found it difficult not to be in a degree infected with the spirit, energy, and strong enjoyment of those who streamed and struggled in to devour some drama full of murders and duels and gushing love scenes—if one might judge by the outside canvases—or those who more soberly waited to test their skill at hitting the bull's-eye.

And in one booth, somewhat apart from the rest, as being of a more elevated tone, there dwelt a fortune-teller: a seer: grave and hoary; dignified, venerable, and *infallible*, asserted the guide: a patriarch, whose years were unnumbered, but who was supposed, like the Wandering Jew, to bear a charmed life. His age, at the very least, must be a hundred and fifty.

The entrance to his mysterious, mystic chamber led through a long passage, lighted with a rosy glow that promised well as a beginning, and for what was to be heard within those portals of Fate. Beyond the rosy passage, heavy curtains, of which the innermost was composed of leopards' skins sewn together, admitted you into a small, square chamber, just sufficiently lighted for its purpose, where sat a sage in a velvet robe that swept around him, his long white hair streaming thick and abundant over his shoulders, his white beard almost reaching to his knees. On entering, he fixed upon you a pair of large, piercing dark eyes that seemed to read into your very soul. Near him was a crystal globe, suspended in some apparently invisible manner from the ceiling, so placed that he could consult it without moving. He bid you approach and take a low seat in front of him, sufficiently near for him to examine your hand when he bid you stretch it forth. And in spite of the rosy passage that lured you on, he was uncompromising, this wizard: consulted his crystal, and examined your palm, and spared neither man nor maid. Some would depart superstitiously impressed, cheeks blanched and limbs trembling, as one who has just received his death warrant at the hands of a skilful leech; whilst others, on whom fortune had smiled, would leave in a species of mental intoxication: perhaps, on the strength of glowing promises, to pass to the physical stage at the first favourable opportunity.

Reader, I am sorry to say for your curiosity—and perhaps for our own also; since we are often deceived by our own hearts—we did not consult the wizard. I can but tell you about him as he was described to me. We resisted the temptation of peering into the

future. Only a few hours ago, Broadley had received an assurance of sufficient good fortune for one day: it need not be heightened, it should not be marred. I was not curious as to the unseen and unknown. The lines of my life were cast. A road lay straight ahead that must be trodden, and the end is the same for all. The "uncertainties" of the future, so full of charm to the hopeful and the strong, for me were over for ever; and the wayside chances and changes that come to each in their times and seasons—I did not think to find these recorded in any crystal. Even if they were, I would rather not know them. Mr. Jago declared that he had *his* fortune at his fingers' ends, and needed no interpreter thereof. He could even prompt the wizard if he found him wandering out of the beaten track.

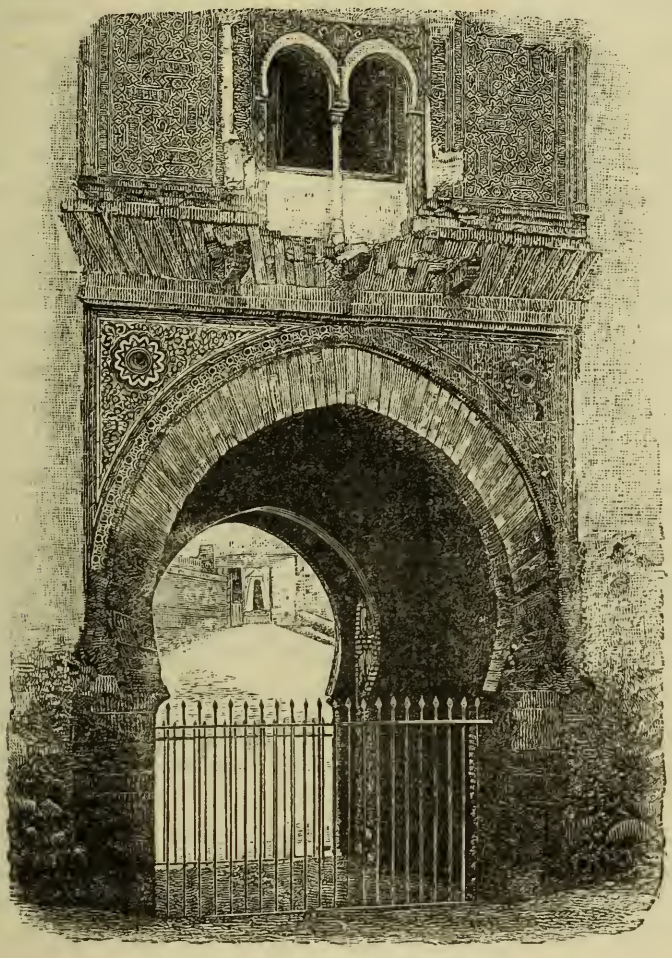
So we did not enter the rose-tinted passage, but turned and left the fair behind us. The road ended—or began—in a square and a café brilliantly lighted and thronged with people. In we went; sat amidst the blazing lights, and listened to the rush and roar of voices; watched the animated faces, the dark, flashing eyes, the gestures that emphasized every other word, the hot Spanish blood that seemed to course so rapidly through the veins. These people are for ever one thing or the other; in them extremes meet; they know no medium; they are all fire and energy and excitement, or all voluptuous indolence; their moods vary with the hour and the occasion; now they are ready almost to take your life, and now they will perform incredible acts of generosity to serve you.

The night was intensely hot, and the ices they brought us at our bidding were delicious in quantity and quality; a rare combination. But we thought of last night, the café in Malaga, the ices we had had there; above all, those wonderful musicians who so impressed us that I hear them almost as distinctly as I did then, even now as I write, when another June has come round, and many scenes and much music have filled up the space between. We had no music here, and nothing to detain us very long; so presently we left the glare and glitter of light and laughter, and went out into the deserted streets that led towards the Alhambra. Everything was dark and gloomy; we did not meet a soul; our echoing footsteps and voices alone broke the silence.

Once more in the narrow Calle de Gomeres, up to the Grecian Gate; once more in the sombre avenue, where the hushed birds were sleeping in the trees, and the silence of night was oppressive. But the moon still rolled in splendour, giving us a flood of soft light that glinted through the whispering branches and cast shadows on our way. We wanted only the nightingales to perfect the night and the scene and the influence; no nightingale could have kept silence here; but they had evidently all fled to other regions—these migratory birds, that come and charm us with their song, and so soon disappear: depart like the fairest things of earth, all we care for most, our dearest

hopes, our cherished aspirations. Do they not all drop from us one by one; fly from our grasp with the fell certainty of an ignis fatuus; leaving in their place in flaming letters the words Disillusion, Disenchantment, Disappointment? Once we doubted Solomon; his wisdom was not for us, his experience not ours; but the day comes when his "Vanity of Vanities," finds its echo in the heart.

The next morning our first duty was to see the Alhambra by day.



PUERTA DEL VINO, ALHAMBRA.

We had seen it by moonlight. That visit had left behind it a profound, unfading impression. Halls, courts and corridors, steeped in silvery light and deep shadows, haunted the imagination. Looking back to those night hours, more than ever it seemed that we had visited a land of enchantment, a building raised by no human power. All one's dreams and conceptions of Eastern beauty and luxuriance were here more than realised. Daylight would no doubt dispel some of the illusion to which memory clung with so much pleasure, but a more intimate acquaintance with the details and surroundings of the Alhambra must prove the gain of a loss.

The sun was high, and the avenue, that not many hours ago had looked gloomy and threatening, was now bright and sparkling, and echoed with the song of happy birds. The picturesque loungers of last night, hovering about trees and walls for reasons foul or fair, had betaken themselves to other haunts. The long, straight, square palace of Charles V. was even less romantic now than in the glow of sunset. We entered the narrow way leading to the modest portal, the door opened silently, and again we passed through, one by one.

Where we had had moonlight, all was now broad sunshine. The dark shadows had disappeared, and with them the mysterious depths suggesting unlimited space. At the end of the small corridor, the visitors' book was the only sign and record to remind one of a commonplace world. There were the small arches and slender columns leading into the Court of the Bath. The exquisite moulding that last night had looked like fine gossamer work was certainly more earthly this morning, though at all times and in all lights it is beautiful and refined. The long rows of myrtles were green and refreshing, and the orange trees pencilled their graceful branches and tender leaves against the side walls that held them. The pool looked so clear, one longed for a plunge, and almost envied the gold fish darting about at will. At the further end, the Tower of Comares was so vividly reflected, one almost started at the appearance of another tower existing below the water. Here surely we had at last found the habitation of the fairy folk who owned all this enchanted ground!

We passed into the Hall of Ambassadors—a splendid room 37 feet square and 75 feet high. Opposite the entrance was once placed the throne of the Sultan, and here amidst regal pomp and splendour he gave audience. There are three arched windows on each side, nine in all, deeply recessed, owing to the thickness of the masonry. The walls are decorated with flowers and leaves, Cufic inscriptions and texts from the Koran, all wonderfully restored, and resembling as nearly as possible their ancient beauty. The ceiling is richly gilded, and coloured in white, blue, and delicate crimson. In some of these ceilings light was admitted through small, stained-glass windows cunningly placed in the roof, which chequered walls and pavement with kaleidoscopic tints that must have entranced the Moorish mind and imagination. What are our nineteenth century ideas of luxury and grandeur, ostentatious glitter and display of wealth, compared with the oriental atmosphere and refinement that distinguished the men of that age?

The ceiling is of alerce or cedar wood, inlaid work of many colours, with devices of stars and crowns; all, as far as possible, imitating the original. The old roof fell in the 16th century, through an explosion of gunpowder in the neighbourhood, and brought down in its ruin a wonderful arch composed of mother-of-pearl, jasper and porphyry. Imagine it for a moment. Nothing more chaste and lovely can be seen than this hall: a dream building, worthy of gracing a world higher,

better, purer than this—if, amongst the stars, such an intermediate state is to be found.

The views from the windows are beyond comparison. From that overlooking the Darro, it is said that Ayeshah the mother of Boabdil, let down the child in a basket to protect him from the fury of his father, and thus saved his life; a life, however, destined to unhappiness and misfortune, defeat, the loss of his kingdom, and eventually death in a strange country and fighting for another's cause. Abn Hasen, the father of Boabdil, appears to have been a fiend in human form, and is said to have sacrificed his children at the Fountain of Lions to satisfy the jealousy of Zoraya, the rival of Ayeshah.

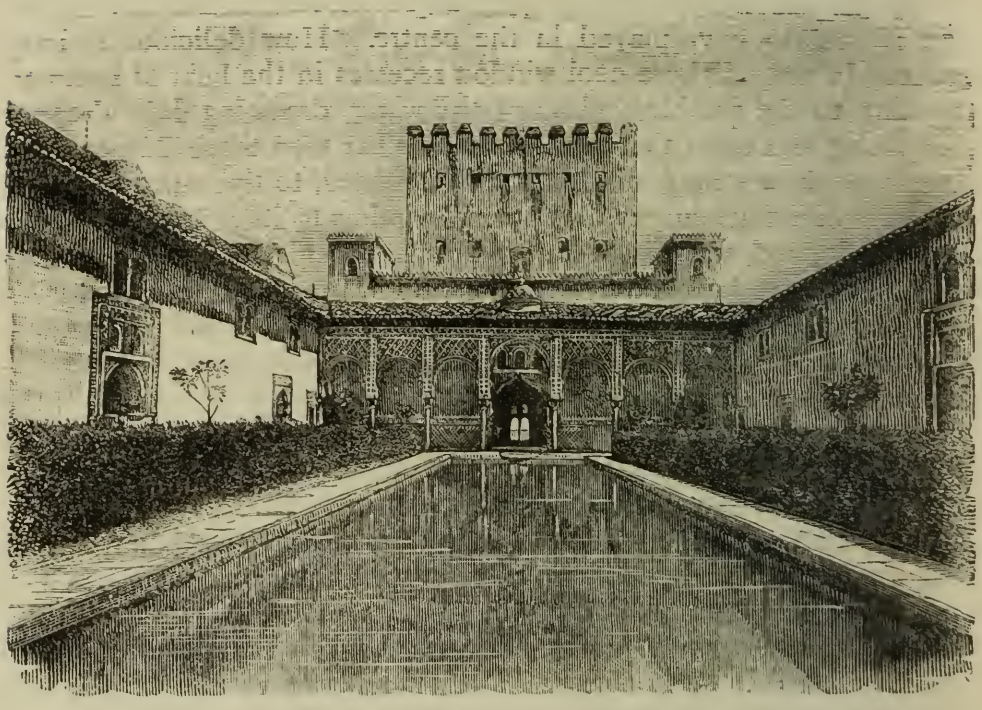
The floor of the hall was of pure alabaster, and an alabaster fountain is said to have played in the centre. How delicious to have reclined in one of those cool window recesses in the heat of summer, listening to the soothing plash of the water, dreaming idle dreams, and gazing out upon that fair world! What men those Moors must have been, how strong-minded and determined, to live surrounded by all this voluptuous luxury and not fall victims to its influence. Poor Boabdil, indeed, was gentle and yielding, but his feminine temperament must have been born with him, and not resulted from education and influence. It is, after all, a temperament that some of the best and noblest men in the world have possessed, and must not be confounded with an effeminate nature. The one is good for nothing; the other will prove capable of feats of heroism, self-sacrifice, martyrdom if need be. It is, happily, rarely found in the world, for it is born to life-long trouble as surely as the sparks fly upwards.

This Hall of Ambassadors was the work of Ibn-l-Ahmar, and is different in style and period from the rest of the palace. From this we entered the Court of Lions, the principal court of the Alhambra, of which one seems to catch glimpses from all points and all other courts and halls. It is of pure Moorish architecture, and is supposed to have been given up to the harem. Cloister-like arcades run down each side, with their exquisite Moorish arches of open filagree work, and slender white marble pillars, that have defied—as by a miracle—the wearing influences of five centuries.

As last night, so this morning, at a first glance, the pillars seemed innumerable. The Court is characterised by inconceivable lightness, grace and refinement. The floor is of marble, and in the centre is the celebrated fountain: an immense alabaster basin reposing on the backs of twelve white marble lions—the lion being a sign of power and bravery in the East, as with us. The arcades are of light and beautiful open-work; and the arches are decorated with the loveliest arabesque designs. The slanting roofs above the galleries and halls are composed of various coloured tiles, highly glazed. At each end of the Court is a pavilion, and at one end a small dome, covered with the same glazed tiles. Above, the blue sky rivals in beauty this fair structure; the sun casts slender shadows

through the columns; it gleams and glitters upon those tiles that now almost look like some molten substance throwing out great flames and flashes that confuse the sight. The mind is bewildered, imagination is dazzled. Where are we, and what can be all this magic influence? Not on earth, surely, and not in a building composed of earthly elements?

Opening from the Court of Lions, passing under the arcades and beyond the slender pillars, is the lovely Hall of the Abencerrages, so named from the legend attributing to Boabdil the murder of the chiefs at the Fountain of Lions, after treacherously inviting them to a banquet. Tradition says (and why contradict it?) that sometimes, in the



COURT OF THE MYRTLES.

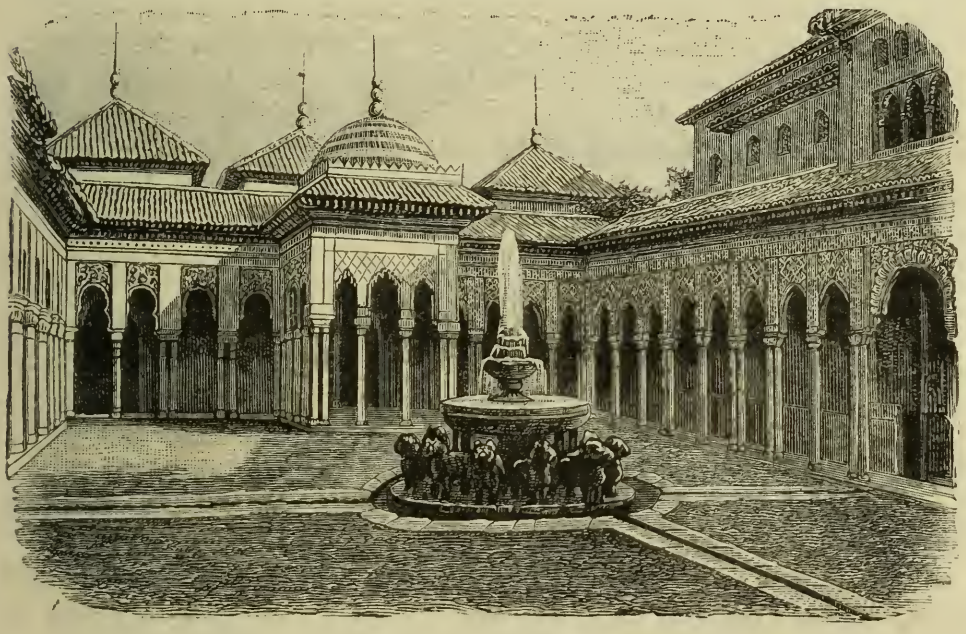
dead of night, you may hear the groans of the murdered, and a sound as of the distant clanking of chains.

But the act, if ever committed, was due to Abn Hasen and not Boabdil, who answers for many of the sins of his father. As we have seen, Boabdil was gentle and kindly, though perhaps wanting in the iron firmness necessary to govern a kingdom. He was born under an unlucky star, and his virtues are eclipsed and forgotten in his misfortunes.

The last king of the Moors, the loser of his kingdom, a wanderer flying for his life across the desolate mountains—this is the picture and impression of poor Boabdil as it has come down to posterity. His picture hangs in the Generalife, and the calm face, and mild, melancholy eyes gaze at you with a sadness that seems to be at once a revelation of his fate and a reproach to history.

No part of the Alhambra is more lovely and refined than this hall, which has been well restored. The decorations of the walls are richly gilded and the interstices pencilled with lapis lazuli and other brilliant colours. The roof, honeycombed and therefore possessing a peculiarly chaste and mysterious beauty, is also richly gilded and painted in exquisite tints. The stucco work of the walls was invented at Damascus. It consists of large plates cast in moulds and invisibly joined, and has every appearance of having been cunningly carved and sculptured by hand, at the cost of infinite time, labour and skill. The devices are intermingled with texts from the Koran, and inscriptions in Cufic and Arabian characters.

The arch opening to the central Hall of Justice is said to be the



COURT OF LIONS.

finest in the palace. The hall itself—on the east side of the court of lions, and possessing seven compartments or divisions—is richly and gorgeously decorated with the loveliest colours, subdued and softened by the semi-gloom, the dim religious light that marks all the halls of the Alhambra.

Only at sunrise or towards sunset, when perhaps the sun shines directly through one or other of the deep, alcoved windows, are the full colours revealed. But the subdued light is one of the charms of these halls, whose loveliness seems too sacred for exposure to the full mid-day glare. The obscurity adds to their refinement, to the feeling of romance and enchantment they throw on mind and memory.

A wonderful influence indeed. This Hall of Justice, in days past given up to the stern necessities of the Tribunal, seemed to us to-day, as we looked and loved its beauty and cool fragrance, only

wanting in downy pillows spread upon those marble floors and deep alcoves to make them the very essence of voluptuous, exquisite idleness. Oh, for rooms here, and a lengthened sojourn ; for uninterrupted privacy, and a possibility of roaming at will from hall to hall, and from court to court, spending hour after hour and day after day in dreamy reverie ; in picturing the past, and conjuring up the lives of the men and women who lived there, and must have been so strange a mixture of rudeness and refinement, of strength and weakness !

We passed into the garden of the Alhambra—the garden of Lindaraja—with its fountain, its orange trees, myrtles and Japanese medlars—that delicious fruit worthy of a terrestrial paradise. Diogenes—without his lantern to-day—picked us oranges, and we thought them ambrosia. Here in the bygone centuries the ladies of the harem must have revelled in the comparative freedom of their cloistered garden. Here they, too, must have eaten oranges and picked violets and listened to the cool plashing of the water. With a glimmer of romance about him, Diogenes also gathered us a few flowers to press between leaves—as Pyramid had pressed and preserved his lily between the leaves of his Sanskrit ; and we charmed him by stowing them away with tender care.

Gloomy walls surrounded the garden, and on one side was a balcony enclosed by iron bars, where poor mad Joan, the wife of wicked Philip, is said to have been cruelly held captive, until the long years passed and set free the burdened spirit. The cool, green garden was grateful, and we lingered longer than we need have done ; but it was our farewell of the Alhambra—we had not the heart to hasten.

Once more through the halls and courts "with lingering steps and slow," like Adam and Eve quitting Paradise, loth and reluctant to leave this enchanted spot, and break for ever the charm that held us spell-bound. It could never be repeated ; even a second visit would not bring back the emotions and illusions that for a time had transported us into actual Fairyland, the reality and romance and magic of the Arabian Nights. In the outer corridor was the book and the table ; Diogenes prayed for our names ; and with these, and a reward for his civility and diligence, his oranges and flowers, we left ; dismissed with his benediction.

It was over. The charm was dissolved. For a moment the spirit found itself plunged in melancholy. What would life seem after this but a tame and commonplace affair ? Let us return and take up our abode for ever in those courts, and live in a dream world, and forget the roar and din and ruder elements of the world beyond !

It was but for a moment. After all, human nature is desperately fickle. We go back to our first loves ; but too often when all song has left the bird that seeks its early haunts, and the rose with wandering has lost its perfume. Before we had gone a hundred yards we were ready to

turn our steps and attention towards the Generalife, its halls and gardens. Yet the impression made by the Alhambra would return; it could never fade. There it was in the memory, there it is still, there it will remain. Nothing I have ever seen has made the same romantic, dreamy, profound impression upon me; nothing, I am persuaded ever will again. There must be a point beyond which we cannot pass. It is hardly possible twice in a lifetime to receive so vivid an effect as that produced by this ancient palace of the Moors. It becomes a possession safe and sure, as long as memory and feeling and the love of the beautiful remain.

Space admits of a very few words only to the Generalife. Perched on the hill side, still higher than the Alhambra, it was the summer resort of the Kings of Granada, and possesses little of the dreamy romance and refinement of the larger building. Its rooms are quickly seen and chiefly interesting for the portraits that line the walls. Boabdil looks down upon you with melancholy eyes, which seem to plead his cause so earnestly that you discard tradition and pass an unqualified verdict in his favour.

The gardens are beautiful. Vines and fig trees abound, and portions of the sloping hill are cultivated. Here again, in the gardens are orange trees and the Japanese medlar; gorgeous blooms and rare flowers, of which, evidently, the gardeners are proud. You walk under trellis work, picturesque with green leaves, with vines and roses that intertwine; and whilst you revel in the cool shade you feel the air heavy with fragrance. Lovely views, near and far off, surround you, and you might spend days and weeks, richly enjoying these beauties of nature and cultivation. For ourselves, our visit was measured by moments. Time passed only too rapidly; we had yet much to do before the day closed.

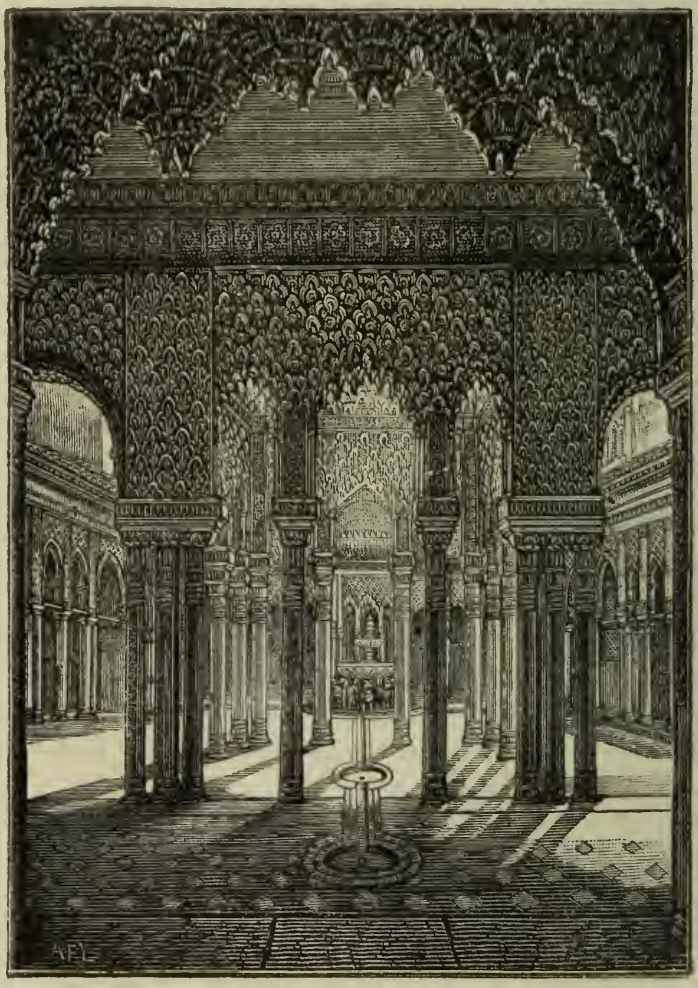
There was to be a Bull-fight in Granada that afternoon, and we held a solemn consultation as to whether or not we should assist at this essentially Spanish spectacle and institution. Ought it not to be seen once in a life time, if only to be able to protest against it for ever after? An unusually splendid bull-fight, it was said, was being organised at Seville in honour of the Duke of Edinburgh, to take place after we had put into Vigo: but a thousand chances might happen to prevent our presence, whilst here was one to hand. We decided in its favour.

Luncheon over, we presently started. On our way we were to visit the Carthusian Monastery and the cathedral, which would dispose of the interval of time at our command. We took the cathedral first.

We had heard much about the cathedral of Granada, and were somewhat disappointed. It is an immense building in the Græco-Roman style, possessing five naves, and a groined roof supported by massive Corinthian pillars. The choir is in the middle of the central aisle, and the dome above is painted in white and gold. The side chapels

are some of them large and richly ornamented; but the most interesting part, perhaps, was the Chapel Royal, the burial place of Ferdinand and Isabella, Philip and Juana, or Mad Joan.

A magnificent screen of wrought iron, divided the chapel, and behind it, religiously guarded, are the splendid alabaster tombs of Ferdinand and Isabella. Full length figures of the King and Queen reposed on

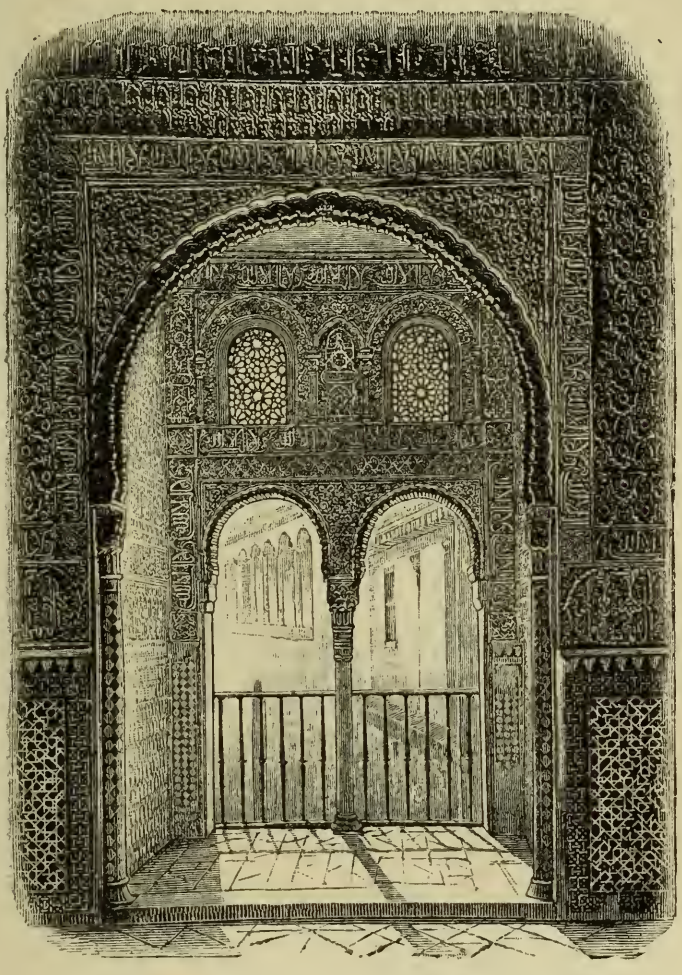


ARCADE IN COURT OF LIONS.

the tombs; and the guide pointed out to our especial notice that the head of Isabella indented her pillow more than that of Ferdinand did his; to signify that she had been the greater of the two, had possessed more wisdom—the "heavier brain:" had done more for the honour and glory of Spain, had been the true and acting sovereign. Beside them were the tombs of Philip and Crazy Jane, possessing in death the repose not granted to them in life. We descended into the vault and saw the five simple coffins resting on shelves; the fifth being the son and only child of Philip and Juana.

Leaving the cathedral, we went on out of the town to the Car-

thusian Monastery. So intense was the heat and glare, that on reaching it, nothing would induce Captain Jago to forsake the carriage. There he would stay quietly whilst we paid our visit. On coming out again we found him surrounded by a crowd of beggars—that scourge of Spain—consigning them, with the calmest air and most benevolent smile to all sorts of distant and unfamiliar places—Kamschatka, Patagonia, and so on.



WINDOW IN HALL OF THE AMBASSADORS.

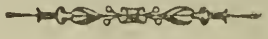
The monastery is an immense building, and was once richly endowed. The cloister corridors are large and decorated with horrible pictures, depicting all sorts of tortures and martyrdoms, representing, said the guide, the persecutions of the Roman Catholics by the Protestants! The chapel is now empty, but still splendidly decorated, bearing testimony to the immense wealth possessed by the monks of old. Like the rest of the building, it now looked dead and deserted.

Once more in the open air, we found Captain Jago, as I have said, in the midst of the unwashed crowd, mildly addressing them in gentle

terms that perhaps it was as well they did not understand. Back to the town, debating upon the approaching entertainment: not altogether sanguine upon the point, but determined to do our duty.

Crowds of people were flocking, in the intense heat and dust, across the Plaza del Toro; streams of carriages were drawing up to the principal entrance. The immense building seemed surrounded by a crowd of idlers, young and old, who, unable to afford to purchase a ticket, were on the look out for some happy chance or good natured person to admit them. Our guide left us to get places, and for about twenty minutes was battling with the crowd that swarmed round the ticket office.

When he reappeared, we followed him to the entrance, and passing through the turnstile, found ourselves within a vast amphitheatre, amidst a perfect sea of faces that reflected nothing but excitement, eagerness and anticipation. Ladies fluttered their fans; a rustle of emotion seemed to run through the vast crowd; a sound like the distant surging of the sea. With feelings of wonder as to what was about to be witnessed, we took our seats and waited for the trumpets to sound.



FROM AFAR OFF.

Oh, my darling, when I meet thee,
  Will thy spirit speak to mine—
Shining from thine eyes to greet me,
Like a dawn-light, deeply, sweetly,
  Saying "I am thine?"

Or shall veil of separation
  Fold thee round away from me;
In a holy isolation,
By no passionate pulsation
  Stirred at sight of me?

Oh! however thou shalt use me,
  Steadfast still my love shall stay.
Out of all the world I choose thee—
If I win, or if I lose thee—
  Thine I am for aye!

A. M. H.

MRS. CARR'S COMPANION.

By Mary Grace Wightwick, Author of "In Lands of Palm."

CHAPTER X.

AT THE ABBEY.

KANE ABBEY was a beautiful pile of buildings, the glory and show-place of the whole county. Standing exclusive and apart in the midst of its own magnificent woods, the proud erection seemed a type of its owner's position among his fellow-mortals, who for many a mile around regarded a Kane of the Abbey with a veneration and respect handed down from old feudal times and well deserved by the present Lord of the Manor.

Well might Lady Mary's heart swell with pride as she entered the great hall one forenoon upon Colonel Kane's arm, and remembered that it would be her daughter's happy lot to be mistress of all this antique splendour of space, and carving, and colour. She glanced with proud satisfaction upon Rose's graceful figure, as she stood with the tinted rays from a stained window near glancing upon her golden head. She was looking unusually pretty this morning, with a flush of excitement coming and going upon her delicate cheek.

The abbey was at last prepared to its master's satisfaction, and in three weeks the wedding was to take place. Meantime, Lady Mary and her daughters had driven over at his invitation to pay a long-promised visit of inspection to Rose's future home. As they made their pleasant pilgrimage through the stately reception-rooms in almost speechless admiration of their antique beauty, Colonel Kane's eye rested proudly upon his young betrothed. His jewel was indeed worthy of its setting. Each seemed to enhance the other's beauty. Never had he prized his ancestral home so much, never had he loved Rose better than on this day so long looked forward to. Rose, too, to-day was so sweet and gentle; less variable, less capricious than for many weeks past. The Colonel basked in the sunshine of her smiles.

At luncheon they were joined by Captain Kane, who had ridden over at his uncle's request to help him do the honours of the abbey. His presence, Olive at least thought, added nothing to their enjoyment. He was no favourite with her, and to-day he spoke but little and seemed in a mood that was the reverse of equable. Both she

and Rose soon became conscious of the discordant element in their party. Rose especially grew silent, and as the meal proceeded scarcely lifted her eyes from her plate. All Colonel Kane's efforts could not win him one of the bright looks of an hour ago.

Luncheon over, their host proposed a visit to the picture gallery, which he had reserved until then. He led the way thither with Lady Mary. Colonel Kane took great pride in his collection, and proved an able cicerone.

"What a lovely face!" exclaimed Rose, pausing before a portrait representing a lady of the last century in a hat and riding habit such as Beatrix Esmond or Di Vernon might have worn. "She has eyes like yours, Montague."

Colonel Kane smiled. "That may well be: she was a Kane—my great-grandfather's sister. She had a sad history. She was betrothed to a cousin, a certain Ralph Luttrell—there is his portrait. He was concerned in the Jacobite rising; arrested during his flight to France, and executed for high treason upon the very day that had been fixed for his marriage. Unlike the proverbial good fortune of the house of Austria, the traditions of our family show that the Kanes have not been happy in their matrimonial arrangements. This damsel in the crimson sacque was jilted by her lover, a wild ne'er-do-well who married an heiress instead, and was run through the body for his pains by the brother of his injured fiancée. Gustavus Kane, the handsome cavalier on your right, parted from his newly-made wife at the church door to obey a sudden summons from the king, and the two never met again. He was killed in a skirmish a day or two later and she died, they say, of a bróken heart."

"What a tale of horrors! Colonel Kane, you are making us all quite melancholy!" remonstrated Lady Mary in a tone half-jesting, half-serious.

He smiled and turned to Rose, saying, in tones whose tenderness he did not seek to disguise: "Our case is to prove the bright exception!" Then in a whisper intended for her ear alone: "Dear Rose, not one of those dead-and-gone Kanes ever won so bonny a bride!

Colonel Kane, like every possessor of the Abbey in succession, had added his quota to its art-treasures. He was anxious to have his guests' opinion of some recent purchases: two or three charming Meissoniers and a modern chef d'œuvre which greatly took Olive's fancy.

Presently, when they had walked the length of the well-lined gallery, Olive returned alone for another look at her favourites. She had not yet recovered her usual health or spirits, and feeling quite unequal to further explorations, sank languidly into the recesses of a luxurious couch to enjoy a half-hour of solitude. Her eyes were weary, and could take in no more splendours of upholstery ancient or modern, no more rare china, nor bronzes, nor bric-à-brac. "Some

day," she said to herself, "when it belongs to Rose I may enjoy it all quietly at my leisure, but 'doing a place' is quite another thing, and I have exhausted all my notes of admiration for the present. This is repose! Those lovely pictures to refresh me, and the pleasure of dwelling upon them in silence." But gradually the silence and the solitude and the somnolent influence of the large wood-fire, near which Olive was seated, prevailed even over the beauties of the great artists' pencils. Olive closed her eyes and sank into a slumber which had lasted at least ten minutes, when a slight sound near at hand roused her, and opening her eyes she perceived John Thorold standing before her with a perplexed expression of countenance, which changed to one of relief as she started up colouring with a mixture of pleasure and vexation. The next instant she was angry with herself for her foolish embarrassment, as Thorold came forward with a matter-of-fact greeting, and began excusing his intrusion.

"Colonel Kane wished to see me on business directly I returned to St. Brenda's. I was told that I should find him here."

"He was here a little time ago, but has gone to show the gardens to mamma and Rose." Her tone was chilling, for she wished to disown the blush that had greeted him.

"Then I will ride over again to-morrow."

Half-relieved, half-sorry, Olive saw him preparing to go, but with a sudden impulse he turned.

"I hope, Miss Egerton, you have quite recovered the effects of your accident? It seems long since it happened, but I believe we have not met since."

"Thanks, I am nearly well again. By-the bye," she began with a voice which she vainly tried to steady; "I have been wishing to thank you. You saved me. I can never forget it, nor the gratitude I owe you."

For one moment she was her natural self as she held out her hand to him with a wistful eagerness which was almost too much for his prudence. He took it and held it a moment in his own while his eyes lighted up.

"Nay," he said, "there is no question of gratitude between you and me, Olive; you must know that! Were we not old friends and companions? Perhaps I got bewildered with my ducking, for as I carried you up the bank I seemed to forget the intervening years, and to hold in my arms once more my child-playmate, my little companion of long ago. It might have been the Kingston meadows round us and the river rippling below; a ridiculous delusion, was it not? But, believe me, I soon came to my senses." With a pained look at Olive's averted face he dropped the hand he had been holding. "Don't be afraid, Miss Egerton; I lost my head for a moment with the suspense and anxiety, and may have said and thought I don't know what wild things, for which I ask your pardon. But rest assured I shall never repeat the offence. In my waking moments I am not likely to forget

the gulf which separates John Thorold, the unknown architect, from Lady Mary Egerton's daughter!"

There was a moment's pause while Olive still stood motionless. She had been touched by his allusion to their old friendship. She was willing to be entreated. Though she had promised herself that she would not yield too easily, a tender appeal might have moved her even now. But not his proud, cold words, which seemed to say that he could live without her—that she counted for little in his scheme of happiness—was less dear to him than his pride.

Well, for her part she would not descend one step from the dais upon which he had enthroned her. She would not deign to speak one word, one little word, though that word would bring him to her feet. With a sigh, which seemed laden with the feelings he dared not speak, he said good-bye, and left her.

Olive remained standing in the same spot, as if turned to stone, as his steps retreated along the length of oaken floor, till faintly from the end of the long gallery came the sound of a closing door. Then she sank back upon the couch and, covering her face with her hands, broke into a wild fit of weeping. The faded beauties from the walls smiled on unheeding, sickly, languid smiles of long ago. Grave soldiers whose battles were all over—courtiers of courts that had passed away, seemed to turn sad, stern eyes upon her, as if wondering what could be worth such grief in this world of passing shadows. But Olive's tears had their way for once.

Meantime Colonel Kane in the library below was disinterring some of his old family jewels, and asking rather absently his future mother-in-law's advice as to altering and resetting, while he glanced out of window every now and then towards the quaint Dutch garden, between the formal yew hedges of which his betrothed and Wilfred Kane had just disappeared. The two figures, once hidden from sight behind a screen of yew and cypress, paused simultaneously, and Captain Kane, turning, faced his companion.

"Rose, when will this dreadful day come to an end? How can you have the heart to torment me so!"

"Wilfred, you forget yourself! What do you mean?"

"Because I am beside myself, you have driven me wild with jealousy. To think that you should be so cruel as to give my uncle that camellia! Ay, and fasten it into his button-hole before my very eyes!"

"Hush, Wilfred! Has he not a right? Besides, he asked me. What could I do?"

"And you expect me to bear with patience this hourly torture! I wish I had not come here!"

"And why did you, pray?"

The vehement answer brought a blush to her cheek.

"Because the temptation of spending a few hours in your com-

pany was too great for me. It is a whole week since I have seen you, and now that we meet at last you reproach me for coming. You were kinder in London."

"Was I? That was different. Ah, those were happy days!" she said, with a little dreamy sigh that emboldened him to take her hand.

"Dearest!"

But he had gone too far. Even Rose's drowsy conscience was sometimes awakened.

"Captain Kane! What are you thinking of? It is time this folly was at an end. Do you forget that three weeks to-morrow is my wedding-day?" She drew herself up with pretty dignity, and began moving towards the house.

"I do not need reminding of the fact," he muttered, so low and sorrowfully that she could barely catch the words. She walked on, with head erect and slightly heightened colour, but at a pace which allowed him to regain her side. As they passed into the house by a side door, he bent down to her, saying humbly, "Forgive me!"

There was not time for words, but her smile seemed to satisfy him, and there was a look of almost triumph on his face as he went to take leave of his uncle and Lady Mary before riding back to barracks.

Rose, meantime, escaped upstairs under pretence of seeking Olive. Colonel Kane would have followed, but she waved him back, and hurried alone, fleet as a fawn, up the broad, shallow staircase. Before entering the picture-gallery, she paused by an open window to cool her flushed cheeks before meeting Olive's eye. She need not have been afraid. Olive was too pre-occupied herself to notice anything unusual in her sister's manner. It was difficult to say which of the two girls was the most distrait and absorbed during the long drive home.

A very silent one it proved. The sisters leaned back in their respective corners, lost in reveries which ran in very different channels. Now that the trying day was over, there was a wearied look on Rose's face, very different from the triumphant glow which still tinged her mother's. The day had been one of unmixed satisfaction to Lady Mary. She was pleased, even beyond her anticipations, with her host's beautiful home; pleased with himself and his attentions; pleased with the prospect of unalloyed happiness in store for her daughter, whom, with a mother's pride, she acknowledged was well fitted to grace the position fate had allotted to her. The day-dreams in which she had indulged, even over her children's cradles, seemed upon the point of realisation; and Lady Mary Egerton was a proud and happy woman.

CHAPTER XI.

THE VICAR OF ST. JUDE'S.

If anything could have added to the already brimming cup of Lady Mary's satisfaction it was a letter in an unfamiliar handwriting, which she found awaiting her on the breakfast-table next morning. The contents were a complete surprise to her, but a pleasant one, as was evident from the well-pleased smile with which she laid it by. She ate her breakfast thoughtfully, but with a subdued air of elation which would have puzzled her daughters if they had happened to observe it. But Olive was languid and silent this morning, and Rose absent and pre-occupied as, perhaps, became a maiden on the verge of marriage.

"My dear, I want to speak to you," said Lady Mary, detaining Viola as she was leaving the dining-room. "Olive, will you go and keep your aunt company for half an hour?"

Lady Mary led the way to her own sitting-room, where they would be undisturbed, and taking Viola's hand drew her down to a seat on the sofa beside her. "Miss Keith, I have just heard some good news concerning a friend of ours. Mr. Vaughan has been appointed to the vacant living of St. Jude's."

Time was when the announcement would have fallen upon very indifferent ears, but it happened that during the last two or three weeks, Viola, having volunteered to fill Olive's place at the schools and with her poor people, who sorely missed her visits, had been brought much into contact with the young curate. Her exclamation of pleasure was therefore hearty and sincere.

"Indeed! I am very glad to hear it. He has worked so hard here!"

"Ah! you have seen a great deal of him lately, have you not?"

"We have met several times at the schools and in the district, while I have been taking Olive's work. He is very much liked by the people."

"Yes; he is a truly estimable man. Both the Archdeacon and myself think very highly of him." Lady Mary glanced at Viola and, finding that she remained silent, continued: "He wrote at once to tell me of his good fortune, enclosing a note, which he begged me to give you, asking me at the same time to use my influence in his favour."

"Influence! Favour! What can he mean?" With a face of utter bewilderment Viola received the note from Lady Mary, and, breaking it open in leisurely fashion, began to read. But before she had reached the end of the first page, the colour ebbed from her face and the paper dropped from her hands.

Lady Mary, noticing her agitation, kindly tried to reassure her.

"My dear, let me congratulate you on having won the heart of so

truly worthy a man. It will give me great pleasure to know you are happily settled—so near us, too, and ——"

"Stop! stop! Lady Mary, it is all a mistake! Oh! I never dreamed of this!"

"It has come upon you suddenly, I see; but on reflection ——"

"No reflection is necessary, Lady Mary. What he asks is impossible! totally impossible!" cried Viola with vehemence.

Lady Mary sat on, serenely unmoved. What was all this flutter and perturbation to her, calmly confident in her power of bending all things and people to her will?

"Miss Keith, be reasonable. By this offer Mr. Vaughan pays you the highest compliment in his power. Any other lady in the place would feel only too much flattered by his preference. St. Jude's is worth £500 a-year, and gives its incumbent a position of some importance among the clergy here."

"It is impossible," said Viola, for all answer.

"Why impossible, may I ask? You may not at present entertain the strong preference for Mr. Vaughan which a girl ought to feel for the man she marries, but this will come all in good time. He is young, good-looking, popular, sufficiently clever—what can you want more?"

"Indeed, Lady Mary, he is all that you say. He has my entire respect and esteem; but—I don't want to marry him."

Lady Mary contemplated Viola doubtfully for a moment, with a half-frown on her brow—she was so little used to have her wishes thwarted. At last she spoke: "Miss Keith, from this strange behaviour, I can only conclude that—there is someone else?"

The end of her sentence took the form of a question as she touched, significantly, Viola's left hand, where, on the third finger, shone an unobtrusive gold guard-ring—the only ornament she ever wore. Viola's face was turned from her; Lady Mary saw only the tip of a small, suddenly-crimsoned ear, as for answer came a low-breathed "Yes."

"Not Captain Kane?" with sudden suspicion, and a quick withdrawal of her hand.

"No! oh, no!" But Viola added nothing to her vehement denial, as Lady Mary had perhaps expected.

"Very well. I don't wish to force your confidence," she said, ever so little stiffly. "In that case there is no more to be said."

There was an embarrassed pause, during which Viola seemed striving for courage to make some confession. It was broken by a loud ring at the front-door bell, the work of a nervous hand. Lady Mary looked at her watch. "Half-past ten! It must be Mr. Vaughan. He asked permission to come and receive his answer from your own lips. I am sorry for him; but it is as well that he should learn his fate at once. I will leave you to explain."

Viola started up, ready to fly like a startled fawn. "Oh, no, dear

Lady Mary! Pray stay and receive him yourself. Say I will write —anything, rather than see him! It would only put us both to needless pain."

"My dear, I insist upon your remaining. The least you can do for him is to give him his answer yourself. And perhaps it might soften the refusal if you gave him the reason for it."

There was no time for further remonstrance. The door opened to admit the new vicar of St. Jude's, who advanced looking eagerly from one to the other, as though to read his fate. Lady Mary only waited to give him her graceful congratulations upon his preferment before sailing away, blind to Viola's entreating looks. She would have been surprised, perhaps, at the simple dignity with which Viola, left to her own resources, received the visitor. All her embarrassment vanished as she spoke.

"Mr. Vaughan, I am so very sorry that this should have happened. Believe me, I never dreamed of such a thing!"

"I fear I have taken you rather by surprise. I only heard of my good fortune yesterday, and my first thought was of asking you to share it with me."

And he thought with satisfaction how well that slender figure, that lovely face, those simple, easy manners, would grace his new vicarage-house. Mr. Vaughan was not naturally a conceited man: but the shower of stoles, cassocks, sermon-cases, and other little marks of personal attention which he received from the lady members of his flock, may be his excuse for supposing he had only to throw the handkerchief to be received with rapture. It was Viola's task to undeceive him.

"Indeed, you pay me a great compliment. I thank you most sincerely, but it cannot be. Even if I were able to return your feeling for me as it deserves—even if ——"

"Ah! my proposal has come too suddenly upon you. Our acquaintance has been short. I ought not to have expected that you could think of me in that way yet; but in time—give me hope at least." He attempted to take her hand, but Viola gently withdrew it.

"Wait, Mr. Vaughan, and hear me out. Even if that were all, there is one insurmountable obstacle: I am bound to someone else!"

A blank look overspread his eager face. "Did Lady Mary know of this?" he asked dejectedly.

"Not until a few minutes ago, and I must ask you to keep my secret. I would not have told you but that Lady Mary thought I ought to do so."

"Your secret is safe with me, Miss Keith. Thank you for trusting me, for it will make my disappointment easier to bear. It is better to know the worst at once." All this time he had been standing by the chimney-piece looking down upon her. He seemed loth to quit his position, or bid farewell to his hopes. Viola was beginning to

wonder what she should say or do next, when, to her great relief, he at last took up his hat.

"I am very sorry," Viola murmured again, as she shook hands without looking up. "Forgive me for bringing the first cloud upon the brightness of your prospects."

Viola had little foreseen such a result from her good-natured offer of taking Olive's work in the district, and her class at the Sunday-school, during the many days of languor and lassitude which followed her accident. This was the one little shadow upon her content just now. For otherwise life was going smoothly with her. She had emerged from under the ban of Lady Mary's displeasure, and in the sunshine of her favour was beginning to lose that awe of her presence which had once possessed her. Mrs. Carr seemed easier to please than of yore, and, in a way, sometimes even showed a grim sort of liking for her companion, which would have been a matter of surprise to Olive if she had not herself long ago succumbed to the charm of Viola's sweetness.

The two were now very often together, and never had friendship dawned more opportunely. Rose had of late withdrawn very much into herself. Perhaps the coming burden of married life, with its cares and duties, was already casting its shadow upon her and quenching her girlishness. Olive, at all events, seemed less to her than formerly, and though the link of sisterly affection remained unbroken, it began to seem a matter of course that each should go her several ways.

Olive, too, had her own cares : regrets which she managed to hide successfully, heartaches, and vain, indefinite yearnings for she knew not what. The skein of life seemed to have become tangled all at once—would patience ever avail to unravel it ?

CHAPTER XII.

THE EVE OF THE WEDDING.

"THEN you will be away all the week ! " said Rose, toying with her rings.

She did not protest against his absence as once before, but Colonel Kane thought it necessary to plead his excuses as they stood together in the oriel window of the Archdeacon's drawing-room.

"This business with my lawyer must be attended to in person. There are several things to arrange. And, dearest, I must make some sort of compensation to Wilfred. He may well feel aggrieved at his old uncle marrying and cutting him out of his inheritance, although he has never shown it by word or deed. Upon our wedding-day I propose to make over to him £10,000."

"Always generous ! " murmured Rose, but without looking up.

"My darling, it is possible that we may not meet again before the twelfth. Are you sure you do not regret ? You are so young, so fair, so bright to cast in your lot with one like myself. I some-

times blame myself for selfishness in letting you make such a sacrifice. Yet how could I give you up?"

He held her at arm's length to gaze at her with passionate tenderness. Her lips quivered, she tried to speak, but for a minute or two no words would come.

"It is only that you are too good for me!" she faltered brokenly at last. And at the words, which seemed to dispel his lingering doubts, he clasped her to him and kissed her again and again. This time, although she did not return, she passively allowed his caresses.

Released at length, she stood with burning cheeks and watched him drive away, him whom she was next to meet upon her wedding morning! He waved his hand as he went and strained his eyes for the last sight of her.

And Rose? Rose stood motionless where he had left her, with drooping head and clasped hands, her eyes fixed upon the massive emerald-studded engagement ring upon her left hand. Once she even made a movement as though to tear it off. But she stopped in time. "No, I cannot, I cannot!" she said at last, under her breath. "It would break his heart!"

That last week of Rose Egerton's maiden life sped away swiftly. There were friends to receive, farewell visits to pay, presents innumerable to unpack.

Anyone for whom the Archdeacon had ever done a kindness, anyone who hoped that he might do them a kindness, protégés of Lady Mary's, pensioners of Olive's, relatives, friends, and pretty well every visiting acquaintance who had ever broken bread under her mother's roof united in sending in a heterogeneous collection to the pretty bride. Mirrors were in vogue—she received six: travelling clocks—eight ticked upon the table, and chimed the hours in voices loud or soft, metallic or pleasing. She could welcome her friends to afternoon tea in china of nine different patterns! Five huge albums were prepared to receive portraits of all shapes and sizes! Thirteen fans in satin, lace, fret-work, foreign or English, lay ready to temper the overheated atmosphere for the future Mrs. Kane. A few seasons back, friends desirous of making a wedding-present had chiefly expressed their feelings in ormolu; now brass was the order of the day; and Rose's half-dozen or so of gold bracelets were quite overshadowed by the brazen prominence of a score of other ornaments for house or table. But nothing could outshine the Kane diamonds, which afforded a nine-days' wonder to the good people of St. Brenda's, till—till something more important distracted the public attention. The wedding-breakfast was to include fifty guests: a large At Home was to follow later in the day. Amid all the turmoil and excitement of preparation, Rose began to look pale and thin. Her mother was occupied and busy in her majestic way. Even Olive's hands were full.

Two days before that fixed for the wedding, the two bridesmaids arrived: Lady Evelyn and Lady Sybil Raleigh, Lady Mary's nieces. Olive drove to meet them at the station, first setting down her mother at the florist's, where she had to give some orders. In the Close, on her way back, with her gay chattering young cousins, they met Captain Kane whirling along in his dog-cart, apparently coming from their house.

Rose met them on the doorstep, with shining eyes and a flush of excitement on her usually pale cheeks. She embraced her cousins and led them in; as was her wont, not saying much; listening, indeed, rather absently to their gay chatter.

"Has Wilfred Kane been here, Rose? We met him in the Close bowling along at his usual dangerous pace."

"Yes, he brought me a wedding-present." And, with fingers which her sister saw were trembling nervously, she opened a morocco case which lay on the table, and disclosed a handsome gold band bracelet with the word *Rose* worked in brilliants upon it. Olive uttered an exclamation.

"Rose! How extravagant of him!"

Rose's cheeks took an even deeper glow.

"So I told him."

"Sybil! Evelyn! look!" Olive turned to display the gift. "What do you think of this present from Rose's future nephew?"

The girls laughed and admired in their happy, good-natured way. And while they were still gazing and fitting the ornament in turn upon their wrists, Lady Mary came in, with her cordial welcome to her brother's girls, and thought with satisfaction of the figure those pretty, aristocratic-looking faces would make in the bridal following, and of how well that dark Norman type of beauty would enhance Rose's fairness. She was proud of these young kinswomen who bore her beloved maiden name.

Then Olive carried them off to see some of the bridal finery, and Rose escaped to her own room. She had been strangely in love with solitude of late.

"Viola! Is that you? Are you going for a stroll? Wait a moment and I will come with you."

It was the eve of the wedding. Olive had been busy indoors all day and pined for a breath of air. She seized a hat, muffled herself in a warm shawl, and joined her friend in the hall.

"It is getting cold now in the dusk," said Viola as they turned into the garden; "but there is such a large fire in your aunt's room, that the air is quite refreshing. Mrs. Carr does not want me again to night; you must let me help you presently, or you will look quite jaded and worn-out to-morrow."

"You shall write some notes for me after dinner, if you will. I have persuaded Rose not to come down again this evening. She

shall have her meals upstairs in peace, apart from all the fluster and worry, and then shut in early for the night and recover her nerve. I found her quite agitated and hysterical just now. We were on the brink of a scene—a thing I hate!"

"She will want all her composure to-morrow," said Viola. "I don't envy her all the fuss and ceremony of a grand wedding."

"Nor do I. But mamma would have been disappointed to have it otherwise. She likes things done in form, as befits the union of a Kane of the Abbey with Lord Castlemaine's niece! But it is hard work for their friends. I have seen nothing of you for days past, and no doubt Aunt Charlotte is horrified at my neglect."

"The grand event gives her something to think about. I really could fancy she has been more agreeable lately and—kinder to me."

"I am glad to hear it. There! I must go in and see about Rose. We dine half-an-hour earlier than usual."

Dinner was quickly disposed of that evening, and almost immediately afterwards, Lady Mary went up to bid Rose good-night and counsel her to retire early. Viola betook herself to the writing-table in the breakfast-room with a list of notes to be written. Her ready pen travelled quickly over the paper. The clock struck eight, half-past eight, and she was still engrossed in her work; the heap of envelopes by her side was increasing rapidly.

The door opened, but she did not stir until a shadow fell upon her paper, and looking up she saw John Thorold standing before her. He had been away from St. Brenda's for more than a fortnight, and Viola rose to give him a cordial greeting. But it died on her lips as, looking round, he exclaimed abruptly: "You are alone! . That is well."

He went and closed the door, and as he returned she saw that he looked disturbed and agitated.

"Miss Keith, I want your help. There is some bad news, which must be kept from Lady Mary and her daughters until this wedding is over. Will you keep the newspapers out of their way for a few hours, if possible? Their brother, Captain Egerton, is ——"

The sudden blanching of her face frightened him. She caught at the back of the chair for support, and clutching his arm as though she would wring the truth from him, gasped: "Not—not ——"

"No, not dead," he answered wondering; "not so bad as that—'Severely wounded,' the telegram says ——"

"Then there is hope! Thank Heaven for that! What did you say? We must keep it from them! O, yes, you are right! And there is hope? Say you think there is hope!"

A white, imploring face was lifted to his with such a strange look of anguish upon it that Thorold was puzzled.

"Yes, yes," he said hastily, trying to reassure her; "but calm yourself, Miss Keith, I entreat you, or you will betray everything. Hush! someone is coming!"

He moved away, endeavouring to assume a careless air of unconcern as the door opened to admit Olive Egerton.

What had come to her? With a silent bow of greeting to Thorold, she deliberately advanced a pace or two towards the table where Viola was sitting, and said, coldly and significantly: "*Miss Romayne*, my mother wishes to speak to you in the library."

Viola neither spoke nor moved, although even in her pre-occupied state she was cruelly conscious of this second buffet which fortune had in store for her.

"At once, if you please. Lady Mary is waiting."

Instinctively Viola made an effort, gathered her forces together and with difficulty rose to her feet. Much concerned at her feeble movements, John Thorold hastily interposed.

"Excuse me, but Miss Keith is not equal to any exertion just now. She is faint and ill; perhaps you will explain to Lady Mary?"

"No, no, I am better now. I will go."

She walked on with a firm step and went towards the door. He went forward to hold it open for her, and as she passed him contrived unobserved to press her hand with an emphatic "*Remember*" as significant as that of King Charles on the scaffold.

Mechanically Viola found her way to the library, and with a gentle knock at the door entered. There was something impressive and awe-inspiring in the solemn silence of its atmosphere. The Archdeacon stood on the hearthrug, with his back to the fire, looking as dignified in his silk stockings and buckled shoes as was possible for one of his small stature. Lady Mary sat stately and majestic in the great leathern chair near him, holding an open letter in her hand. As Viola approached, the Archdeacon silently moved a chair towards her. She thanked him, but did not take it. Scarcely knowing, indeed, where she was, or what had befallen her, she stood like some pale prisoner at the bar of judgment waiting to be addressed.

"I sent for you," began Lady Mary in chilling accents, "because I have just received a friendly warning that the person called Viola Keith, whom I have received and sheltered, and had come to look upon almost as a child of my own, has no existence. With Viola Romayne I have nothing to do. After to-day, therefore, Mrs. Carr will no longer require your services."

Lady Mary had, perhaps, expected an interruption of tears, protestations, reproaches. She was met by a resistless, passionless calm, upon which her words fell harmless. "Have you nothing to say for yourself?—no excuse to make?" she asked, at last breaking the painful silence.

Viola slowly raised a pair of stedfast eyes to the face turned upon her so sternly.

"Lady Mary, have I failed in any of the duties I undertook when I came here? Have I not faithfully fulfilled my contract?"

"I have no cause of complaint. You have carried out your

engagement, but that engagement would never have been entered into with Viola Romayne, whose motive in entering this house under false colours is, I confess, a mystery to me. Had my son been at home," with bitter significance, "I could have better understood it."

The shaft, pointed with all the acuteness of Lady Mary's displeasure, found its way between the joints of Viola's panoply of sorrow to her bruised and aching heart. She took a step forward, and a flash of indignation wakened in her eyes.

"Lady Mary, what have I done that you should insult me? I may have been wrong, but do me the justice to believe that my motives at least were pure. You exacted from me a promise to hold no correspondence with your son; and, whatever it has cost me, I have kept my promise. Is it so strange that, in my loneliness, I sought the shelter of his mother's roof, where I could, at least, sometimes hear of him, inspired also by a wild hope——but why should I condescend to explain? Good-bye, Lady Mary. I will not spend another night beneath the roof of one who can so misjudge me."

She turned proudly, with burning cheeks, her slight figure drawn up to its full height. For the moment she could remember only her wrongs.

"Stay. I do not wish to treat you unfairly. You have been six months with Mrs. Carr. In this purse you will find a year's salary, to compensate you for the inconvenience of a sudden change."

But Viola waved away Lady Mary's hand and its contents.

"No; I cannot take your money, Lady Mary. I worked for other wages; and since you deny me those, I will go away empty-handed."

She was moving away, but the Archdeacon interposed.

"Stay, my dear. Mary, pray consider a moment! Miss Romayne's conduct may have been deserving of censure, but not of cruelty. Be more merciful in your judgment." He looked appealingly at his sister-in-law, but she made no signs of relenting, and he knew, of old, the uselessness of contending with that iron will. Finding her obdurate, he turned once more to Viola.

"Miss Romayne, the carriage shall be at your service as early as you please to-morrow, and after a night's reflection I trust that Lady Mary and yourself will part better friends."

But Viola had relapsed into a state of abstraction. She seemed scarcely to gather the meaning of his words, only answering gently to all his arguments. "To-night—I must go to-night."

"Impossible, my dear! We cannot allow it! A young creature like you! Mary, use your influence."

"Excuse me, Archdeacon, I have no wish to interfere. Miss Romayne is apparently well able to take care of herself."

The Archdeacon withdrew his detaining hand, for remonstrance seemed useless, and as in a dream Viola passed on. In the doorway she met Olive coming in, and with a wild, hungry longing for a word,

a crumb of sympathy in her utter misery and desolation, Viola caught her hand and looked up at her in mute appeal. But there was no relaxing of Olive's sternly-set features as she loosed her hand from that despairing clasp and turned away. Viola just managed to get outside the door, but as it closed behind her, her powers failed. She leaned her head against the wainscot and buried her face in her hands.

"Miss Keith, I fear you are in great trouble. What can I do to help you?"

The voice belonged to John Thorold, and his was the kind hand laid upon hers. She looked up, trying to collect herself. "You know all?" she asked, colouring.

"Yes; Miss Egerton has told me."

"And you are willing to befriend one so utterly friendless?"

"Yes."

"Then help me to leave this house before another hour has gone by. Which is the best hotel here? Can you secure me rooms?"

"I could do so, but perhaps I can arrange a better plan. Leave me to manage for you while you go upstairs and put your things together. I will come back."

She obeyed, for she felt powerless to think or plan for herself, and in the same tearless calm toiled through the long corridors to the room she had first entered with such bright hopes. There was no time to lose, and occupation staved off thought. In five minutes' time the room was a scene of confusion. Drawers, wardrobes, standing open—boxes half filled.

A gentle tap at the door presently interrupted Viola's labours, and to her wonder there appeared the bright face of Lady Evelyn.

"Miss Keith, can I help you? Sybil says you are going away—this very evening, too! Oh! Miss Keith! I was with my aunt when Captain Kane's letter came—was she very angry with you? I feel quite afraid of her when she looks so stern and grave!"

Viola smiled faintly, but the coming of the loquacious young visitor shed just a ray of comfort upon her outer darkness of despair and loneliness, and her quick hands were helpful. Viola's properties were nearly packed away by the time another interruption came in the shape of a kind little note from Miss Hammond.

"Dear Miss Keith,—John has explained everything to me, and you must consent to come and occupy our spare room to-night and as long as you like afterwards. The Archdeacon approves and everything is ready. John has promised to wait and bring you safely over to us. Yours very truly,

"Mary Ann Hammond."

Wondering and grateful, Viola could not but accept an offer which solved all her difficulties in the present, and would give her time to think and plan. She sent a hasty and thankful acceptance, and a

quarter of an hour later, travelling-bag in hand, joined Mr. Thorold, who was talking to the Archdeacon in the hall. Mr. Thorold relieved her of her burden, and the Archdeacon came forward with a kind good-night, and "I hear Miss Hammond has promised to take care of you."

"Now," said Viola calmly, as they emerged into the darkness of the Close, "tell me all. I have a right to know." Her blush was unseen in the darkness.

"It was two days ago. The troops were suddenly surprised, and obliged to retreat before the enemy. They were crossing a river. There was great loss of life. This evening's news makes many homes desolate in England. The telegram gives no particulars, but after the long list of dead comes the name of 'Captain Miles Egerton, A.D.C., severely wounded.'" There was a gasp and a shudder from his companion, but no words. Going closer he made her take his arm. They were half way across the Close before he spoke again.

"Miss Romayne, had I known, I would never have broken the news so suddenly. Forgive me the pain I have caused you."

"Is not this atonement?" she said simply, roused for a moment to a grateful sense of the trouble he was taking.

Lights were flashing out hospitably from the windows of the house they were approaching, and its mistress herself met them on the door-step with a cheerful welcome. It seemed a strange vicissitude in Viola's life which had made her dependent upon the kindness of this almost stranger—one whose acquaintance she had only made a few weeks since, when taking Olive's place at Miss Hammond's Dorcas meetings. The little old lady, however, had a motherly way with her, and made her weary dispirited guest quickly feel at home. How thankful poor Viola presently was to find herself in the small snug room allotted to her, alone, and able to face her trouble! Nothing could have been cosier than that gable-windowed chamber, all fragrant with the scent of lavender, the bright fire crackling in the quaint Dutch-tiled stove; nothing could have been softer, fresher, more comfortable than the dimity-hung bed. But in spite of all allurements to slumber, very little sleep visited Viola that night. She heard the deep tones of the Cathedral clock cleave the wintry air again and again as she passed the weary hours in anxious thought, or in restless wanderings up and down the room, a prey to images of horror born of suspense and anxiety.

And so the morning dawned upon Rose Egerton's long-anticipated wedding-day.

(To be continued.)

ONE DAY.

We can never forget that one day, heart's dearest,
The day that to us was the first of days—
All the days and years of our lives before it
Are faintly seen through a shadowy haze;
Is it true that for years I lived without you?
It is hard to believe such a time could be;
But a day dawned that gave me to you, heart's dearest,
And you to me.

Could any eyes see it but ours, heart's dearest,
The glory that shone on the world that day?
Was it only a gloomy October morning,
With cold winds blowing the leaves away?
The gusts that swept through the fading beech-wood
Were gales from Eden to you and me,
The leaves fell upon us like blessings, heart's dearest,
From every tree.

Some fairy had been in the wood, heart's dearest,
And laid a spell on it, strange and sweet—
They might have been roses that strewed our pathway,
Those leaves that rustled beneath our feet.
What did we care that the leaves were falling?
Little we recked that the sky was grey,
For the sun had risen on our lives, heart's dearest,
To shine for aye.

Spring is the time for the birds, heart's dearest,
For the cuckoo to call and the lark to sing!
Summer for roses, and autumn for harvest,
And "There is a time for everything."—
But for wooing and winning what does it matter,
Fair summer sunshine or winter grey?
Love has all times for his own, heart's dearest,
And every day.

Yet we would not go back to that day, heart's dearest,
For the loss would be more than the gain would be;
The love in our hearts has grown stronger and deeper,
Mine for you, darling, and yours for me.—
The light that illumined the wood that morning
Shines clearer now on our onward way;
For life and death we are one, heart's dearest,
Since that glad day.

THE OFFICER'S BUTTON.

By Constance McEwen, Author of "Gin a Body Meet a Body."

SOUTHSEA never looked better than on that afternoon. It was between four and five o'clock, and a perfect sky made a perfect background to the Isle of Wight, which stood out distinctly in the distance.

Woods creeping down to the sea, and that sea bathed in this glorious sunlight, smiling back at those woods with its happiest smile, as if the appointed bounds, which might hold it in check to-morrow, had never fretted or held it back from the lawless exercise of its gigantic will. Houses clustering thickly here and there; church steeples pointing upwards; range of cliffs and wide expanse of downs —verily it looked a sort of El Dorado land over there.

"The heart of the island must look fair enough to-day," thought Reine Crawshay, as she strolled across the common towards the sea-wall, which forms one of the most fashionable promenades of Southsea. For here you can walk close to the sea, which at high tide is rippling at your feet; and from here you see many a Trooper come sailing along, bearing the English flag proudly enough, as with the slow stately movement which seems peculiar to troopers, they pass on to the east or west, as the case may be, their decks sown with red, like a field of poppies. And from here you can watch the steamers crossing and recrossing to Ryde, and the yachts cutting along or at anchor; or if you are interested in the last and most subtle manner of warfare, you can study torpedo practising. Indeed you can be well versed in naval and military tactics in this gay little Southsea, with its guns bristling from every nook and corner, and its various objects of interest lying but a stone's throw off in the Portsmouth docks.

"I think, Tartan, if you had less hair, you might swim across to the Wight," thought Reine aloud; "it looks so near."

Tartan gave way to a bark of very deep meaning. Reine was smiling at him, and who more observant of smiles or frowns than Tartan, the distinguished son of the distinguished champion Piper; a skye-terrier who rejoiced in the smiles of royalty, having paid a visit to the Queen at Buckingham Palace, and to the Prince and Princess at Marlborough House.

After this, Tartan felt he had an hereditary right to bark, and to bark loudly; it was all very well for vauriens to muffle up their organs; even Tootles, his intimate friend, who hailed from Lancashire, and had a pedigree, knew better than to bark in consort with him.

"This is more charming than London, eh, boys?" said Reine, as she threw the bo-peep stick she carried for them to run after.

The "boys" evidently thought so as they bounded off with the unrestricted movements plenty of space permits.

Reine Crawshay had a face of the "Burne-Jones" type. You saw poetry, perhaps drama, in the changing shifting beauty which encompassed her, impossible to see prose.

Artists in Rome had declared that Miss Crawshay had a form moulded after the Grecian, and hazarded that you might divide her, as the Greeks did their perfectly beautiful human figures, into eight or ten parts, and she would pass through the ordeal triumphantly. Her proportions were faultless, and Mrs. Crawshay, who had been "going round," as the Americans call it, for some time, listened with some pleasure and some displeasure to the artistic whisper, but at last let the latter feeling have sway; for she said: "Of what avail the Burne-Jones face and the Greek form, if Reine will be so fastidious? Why can't she marry Mr. Bevis, who is so persistent and so rich; or Mr. Fortescue, who has pursued her from New York? What does she want—a demi-god?" And Reine would lay her finger on her lip and smile, when Mrs. Crawshay thus lamented, and say—

"Yes, a very out-of-the-way, distinguished, bewildering sort of demigod. I must feel like Miss Buchanan when she fell in love —I'm *going*, *going*, *going* ——"

It was then Mrs. Crawshay had shuddered, and felt that for Reine, there would, there *must* be drama. And now the season in London was over, and Mrs. and Miss Crawshay were passing a few weeks at Southsea before returning to America; for, said Mrs. Crawshay: "I'm weary of going round, and Reine must find her demigod among her own people."

Reine had lingered by the sea-wall till the sun had gone down, with all those attendant glories of hue which change a landscape into a phantasmagoria of shifting beauty, and set one speculating; while winged birds were hovering over the surface of the ocean whispering some secret surely of chance or change.

Regretfully Reine turned away as the cannon boomed out the hour of sunset, from the mystic teaching of sky and sea and bird, to the prose of furniture, food and intercourse.

Suddenly Tartan rushed back from a long run on ahead, and deposited in wild excitement something small and gleaming at the feet of his mistress.

Stooping down Reine picked it up, and found it to be a regimental button; she looked at it curiously. Somehow the button interested her. It seemed as it lay in her soft white hand (for Reine had taken off her gloves to examine it more carefully) to appeal to her strangely.

It was a bright button; it looked new; Reine found herself speculating. To whom does it belong? Has it seen much or any service? She even sat down on a stone to examine it yet more carefully.

"I believe it's an officer's button," she thought. "I wonder when

he will miss it? He must have lost it to-day; it would hardly look so bright if it had been long lying about on this common. The 9— were practising this morning. Come, Tartan, this is the only trophy of our going round, in which I feel, somehow, particularly interested. You have found it, I will keep it; what do you say to this arrangement?"

Tartan looked up, as only Tartan could, the philosophy of a hundred ages in his deep clear eyes, then barked three approvals, and, with the button in her hand, Reine returned to the Queen's Hotel. Mrs. Crawshay was sitting at the open window watching the approach of Reine. Impossible not to admire this stately girl! But for the demi-god in perspective Mrs. Crawshay's chaperonings could be over, and some rest and happy folding of hands; if only Reine would be like other girls, and believe that in the flow of years the ordinary and extraordinary come down to the same level. But Reine had no arithmetic.

"Mamma, I've found a treasure," said Reine, as she entered the room.

"Is it a demi-god?" said Mrs. Crawshay, ringing the bell.

"Perhaps *it* belongs to one," said Reine smiling.

Mrs. Crawshay glanced at the button carelessly, and said:

"Rubbish! throw it away."

But Reine slipped it into her purse, and murmured something about being attached to it. Whereupon Mrs. Crawshay shrugged her shoulders and thought: "She will end in *comedy*, not *drama;* where does she get her high-flown ways? Not from her father, and most assuredly not from me."

The next day was Sunday, and Mrs. and Miss Crawshay went to the Garrison Chapel at Portsmouth.

"Such nice music; and entrance by the private door; and such a brilliant staff, and such a good preacher! All this I have heard from Mrs. Twemlow," said Mrs. Crawshay as she climbed the ramparts which lead to the glorious old chapel which was once a hospital, and now with its battered flags from end to end of its beautiful aisles is one of the most interesting objects of that borough.

Regiment after regiment was played in, and Mrs. and Miss Crawshay, sitting just behind the officers on parade, felt peculiarly interested in the service, which was altogether unique.

In the corner of the long pew in front of Miss Crawshay sat an officer in the uniform of the 9— Highlanders.

He was distinguished looking. The head of an Apollo in one of the Roman galleries would obtrude itself, and all the languor of a day spent not long ago amidst these wonders of the world, mingled with Reine's devotions as she caught the untranslatable charm of the physical beauty of form.

In Italy form greets you at every turn; in England it is certainly associated with race; and Miss Crawshay, perhaps because race is of no account in the States, valued generations exceedingly.

Mr. Bevis and Mr. Fortescue had distressing hands and feet; their

entrances and exits betrayed them. As they moved about in the gilded salons to which their wealth had introduced them, you failed to discern their generations behind them, the shadowy forms of wigged gallants and hooped ladies, the refinement handed down as an indestructible heir-loom through the rolling centuries.

No money could compensate in Miss Crawshay's eyes, for these subtle, yet charming matters of detail, which consciously or unconsciously make or mar the music of a life.

Like harmony in colour, was this harmony of manner and movement to Reine Crawshay. She felt she might drive by the side of Mr. Bevis or Mr. Fortescue in a golden coach, but she would be conscious of these details; and consciousness of any kind will not lend itself to the state of *going, going, going* in which she had declared she wished to find herself.

The service proceeded, and Reine noticed that the officer who sat in the corner of the pew handed a hymn-book to the soldier in a chair at his side. Mingling with her devotions was the thought that this distinguished individual had, perchance, a kind heart, and this accompaniment to l'air noble Miss Crawshay felt to be a matter of no small importance.

The sermon commenced, and the officer's left shoulder vanished and his right came prominently into view as he prepared to listen, with his head resting on his hand, to the words of the preacher.

Miss Crawshay suddenly gave a little start.

Yes, he had lost a button; there were two on his right shoulder, and there should be three; there were three on his left shoulder. Undeniably he had lost a button, and as the buttons corresponded with the one in her possession, she felt sure that it was his button. She commenced to feel more than ever interested in "*the button.*"

The sermon ended, the organ pealed out a grand march, the officers moved off to join their companies outside, and Mrs. and Miss Crawshay, after watching the various detachments march past to their respective bands, returned to the Queen's Hotel.

On the next day Miss Crawshay took "the button" to a jeweller, and had it arranged as a stud for her collar; and when Mrs. Crawshay noticed it, she merely said, "I'm attached to it."

"Mr. Bevis or Mr. Fortescue would give you 'ropes of pearls,' Reine, and yet you will wear an old button picked up on a floating bog."

"It was Tartan's present to me, mamma, and Tartan is so sensitive."

Mrs. Crawshay once more said "Rubbish!"

On the Wednesday following, the band of the R.M.A. was to play at the E —— Barracks, and gay little Mrs. Twemlow came flying into the Crawshays' sitting-room to drag them hither.

"Such a splendid band, Reine. Everybody goes, and you must

come. Now, make haste; put on your most æsthetical costume, and let us Americans show the English how to dress. I assure you somebody said I was a *cat*"—(Mrs. Twemlow affected a stammering lisp when it suited her)—"because I said that the English aristocracy would marry into American families more than ever now that there is so much intercourse between the nations, and I was called a *cat* again. Was it not very exasperating?"

"*Very*," said Reine, laughing. "I suppose I may take the boys?"

"The boys! What boys?" said Mrs. Twemlow, aghast.

"Why Tartan and Tootles."

"Not if I'm coming," said Mrs. Twemlow, fixing her pince-nez. "Don't you know that I'm a *cat!*"

Mrs. Twemlow's vivacity in no way diminished when they reached the barracks. She drew her chair close to Reine's and commenced a running commentary on everybody. She was un peu moqueuse, but never ill-natured; and Reine, as she sat in the drowsy light of the waning summer, felt half amused, and half disdainful of the prattle at her ear.

Rags of rosy clouds were travelling westwards, the sea had fallen asleep to its own music, a bowed figure in a boat might have been telling his beads; the scene shifted. Reine was back in Rome, she was watching the sun-set from a grand old palace, which had a garden sloping to the Tiber, the scent of orange trees and cyprus, the shade of palms was about her; Mrs. Twemlow's prattle became less and less distinct, and Reine's "Burne-Jones" expression more and more intense.

"A *cat* may look at a king, Reine—did you ever hear that proverb? There is a calm dignity about it, savouring of Plato, the only man who has ever seen two sides to everything."

"Heard what?" said Reine, turning her eyes in leisurely fashion from those hurrying westward clouds to the contemplation of the last thing in bonnets which crowned Mrs. Twemlow.

"About the *cat* and the king," said Mrs. Twemlow. "But seriously, in practical England we hear of *catches;* now in America we are far too simple a folk to know the meaning of such terms. However, if you want to explain anything, show it demonstratively. Here comes a *catch;* the despair of chaperons. He possesses those worldly surroundings women are supposed to covet: estates in England and Scotland, a title in prospect; but oh, a mind which as yet retains the indifferentism of a Socrates as regards marrying, for he declares whether he marry or not he will repent it. And when a man takes to philosophy you may reckon him as lost amongst the transcendentals. However, a cat may look at a king, and as I'm the *cat* par excellence, I shall avail myself of my feline privileges, and in a few minutes (for I see he is making his way towards us) I will introduce him to the Florentine American, as you are termed in Southsea. Sarah is with him. Sarah is his aide-de-camp."

"What do you mean?" said Reine.

"What do I mean, Miss Crawshay? Sarah is a sub in the same regiment as Captain Greville, and I think it must be because he is so round and rosy that he is honoured with the distinguished friendship of our military philosopher." After this, Reine did glance towards the spot from whence the Atalantean shoulders were approaching, and recognised, in mufti, the owner of "the button."

Mrs. Twemlow speedily made Captain Greville known to Miss Crawshay, whose hand he noticed, as she inclined her head, sought her collar hurriedly, and even nervously, in a faint endeavour to hide the hapless button under the white lace muffler she had just tossed about her throat.

"Let me help you, Reine; you are cold," said Mrs. Twemlow, kindly, "the lace has caught somewhere. But what is this? an officer's button worn as a stud! a novel idea."

Captain Greville saw Miss Crawshay crimson, and wondered; and wondering, speculated; and speculating, became convinced that there was a romance attached to the button, and then fell to envying the object of the romance. The "Burne-Jones" face and the Greek form had not escaped the critical eyes of Captain Greville, even though he was so immersed in transcendental philosophies.

"Tell us all about the button, Reine," said Mrs. Twemlow, mischievously. "Captain Greville is quite as curious as I am, only he is not a Yankee."

"Not so fortunate," said Captain Greville.

Mrs. Crawshay here broke in. "Imagine Reine wearing such rubbish! She picked it up on the common, I believe, and has taken a romantic fancy to it; but nobody can account for Reine's predilections."

Captain Greville looked down, his chin resting on his hands as they clasped his stick; here was a clue to the romantic acrostic.

Mrs. Twemlow talked in vain both to him and at him, his replies were vague and absent. Soon after, he bade the ladies adieu.

"I don't think him a king any longer," said Mrs. Twemlow as she watched his retreating figure; "and I think a cat wouldn't hardly care to look at him. Sarah seemed quite crushed by the indifferentism of his chief. I shall not fail to ask Sarah the raison d'être."

"A man who looks at his boots is no good at all," said Mrs. Crawshay. She thought it extremely *droll* that anybody should be absorbed in the contemplation of their boots when a "Burne-Jones" face was beside them; Yankee eyes were more appreciative.

Several days passed and Reine saw nothing further of the owner of the button; but one afternoon a servant left a small parcel for Miss Crawshay, and, on opening it, Reine found the fac-simile of her button wrought in gold, flashing with diamonds, and arranged as a collar stud.

An exquisite smile curled Reine's lips. Captain Greville had not only discovered the loss of his button, but the owner of it.

"Do you think Mr. Bevis or Mr. Fortescue could have been so original, mamma?" said Reine, as she tapped significantly the new stud she had not hesitated to place in her collar. "Ah! I'm very much afraid that, like Miss Buchanan, I am *going, going, going.*"

Mrs. Crawshay murmured something about *going* to New Orleans next week; she dreaded the impending drama.

"What about the stud?" said Mrs. Twemlow later on, as she held a cup of translucent china in her slim white hand, and sipped souchong. "Of course I know who sent it—the despair of chaperons. Widows are supposed to be dangerous; if they are, 'tis because they are confident, and confidence robs itself in some sort of power. But Captain Greville has failed to see *my* attractions—I conclude he has found some in you."

"Perhaps so," said Reine.

"He would not, Reine, unless you were altogether out-of-the-way; I suppose you are altogether out-of-the-way. I know your tea-gowns are. Yes, I guess he thinks so."

"Perhaps so," Reine repeated.

"She is so indifferent, is she not?" continued Mrs. Twemlow, addressing herself to Mrs. Crawshay.

"Indifferent to poor Mr. Bevis and Mr. Fortescue," said Mrs. Crawshay. "These men will be presidents, some day."

"Don't telescope them," said Mrs. Twemlow.

Reine laughed, and Mrs. Crawshay joined in, though she failed to catch the full flavour of Mrs. Twemlow's joke.

"If duplicate individuals could be telescoped, they would be less untidy," continued Mrs. Twemlow. "A friend of mine has ten daughters; now supposing they could be doubled up like a telescope, what a blessing it would be. There are eight thousand more women than men in the parish in which I reside! Let me examine the stud."

"I would rather not," said Reine, laughing.

"Why?"

"Examinations are the destroyers of luxuriant fancy. I detest microscopes."

"Captain Greville knows how to design. Reine, do you think philosophy will prove stronger than love?"

"Love should prove stronger than philosophy. But is Captain Greville in love?" said Reine.

"Mrs. Crawshay, I protest. Tis a pity your daughter will not marry a future president; she would be inimitable in New York."

"It has been my dearest hope," said Mrs. Crawshay.

"Statuary destroyed my eye for form," said Reine. "You should have avoided Rome, mamma."

"I suppose you have noticed the setting of Captain Greville's head, Reine?" said Mrs. Twemlow.

"I should have failed to profit by my artistic studies had I not."

Mrs. Twemlow sipped tea and was silent; then said:

"Some ladies said I was a *cat;* were they right?"

"As much right as wrong, I expect," said Reine, carelessly. "Balance is everything."

"There are moments when it is difficult to maintain one's balance. I suppose, Reine, you never lose yours?"

Reine's hand sought the back of head.

"I perceive," said Mrs. Twemlow. "Morality lurks in that direction! Mrs. Crawshay, from every point of view, I think Reine ought to be the future president's wife! she has no confusion of sentiment, knows nothing of dalliance, that idle pastime which eats into our vitals, and, alas, corrupts us. I often think the birds are wiser than we, for each year they build in the same trees, and are faithful to the same spot."

Then Mrs. Twemlow glanced remorsefully at her wedding-ring, and even sighed. Captain Twemlow was a memory, and she had to shake herself into faithfulness to that memory.

The reflection, like the sigh, was spasmodic. That over, she took up the translucent china cup once more, and this time fell to examining it with the eye of a connoisseur, and glided into art talk from old china to lacquer. Then, before leaving, she caught Reine's hands, and said: "We must go to the band to-morrow, for if you are to return to New Orleans next week, time is short; there is only *one* thing shorter, and that is ——" but with a wave of her hand and a flash from her eyes, she was gone with her sentence incomplete.

Captain Greville found himself about an hour too soon at the E—— Barracks the following day. As he paced up and down the parade ground, he repeated to himself his reversed opinion with regard to Socrates; *he* was now a misanthropical fellow, and he should not follow his advice; for did he, Captain Greville, take a wife, he should not repent it.

"My dear Reine, the Grand Prix is here, and absolutely without Sarah," said Mrs. Twemlow, who had fidgeted the Crawshays to E—— also long before the band commenced.

Captain Greville's steel-grey eyes at once sought "the button." Yes, there it was, with no impeding muffler to hide the flash of diamond or the gleam of gold. He flushed red under his bronzed skin, and certainly held Reine's hand one second longer than Mrs. Twemlow's. He began to understand something Socrates did *not*—the ecstasies of a human affection. Mrs. Twemlow suddenly found Mrs. Crawshay a very interesting companion; so interesting that she could but lend herself to the illumination that lady cast on storms and tempests both predicted and fulfilled. She even sympathised over the horrors of the mal de mer, and joined in a woeful examination of Mrs. Crawshay's stout little members, as, pointing oracularly at them, Mrs. Crawshay

declared that she, for one, trusted implicitly to none other form of conveyance. Nay, Mrs. Twemlow went further in self-immolation, for she said: "I think they have 'gone round' so successfully that you should let them rest a little in this borough."

Meanwhile, Reine was listening to words which seemed for the first time to be vascular and alive; words to which a thousand hitherto unawakened pulses were beating. Captain Greville's phrases clothed themselves in a thousand forms. He was subtle, simple, passionate, without ceremony and yet full of the most delicate ceremony, and this at the touch of what was undecipherable.

"Tartan found 'the button,' did he?" at last he said; and some of the passion of his glance absolutely fell on the grizzly coat of the skye. "Tartan shall no more go to New Orleans than his mistress shall go. If this style of courtship does not suit you, I can but try another; but though I try ten thousand styles, remember I shall use the same text. Buonaparte said the Austrians don't know the value of time; I *do* know its value. You must never go to New Orleans."

Reine had demanded a bewildering demi-god. The bewildering demi-god had come at her bidding, and the demi-god gave her no time to make answer, for he swept her along on the mad current of these living, breathing words, which were intoxicating her senses like the fragrance of ground sown with the pale rare beauty of the Daturas flower.

"You see, it is, it must be destiny," he exclaimed vehemently. "If Tartan had not found my button, there would have been no link between us; but—" (and here he laughed, half anxiously, half gladly, wholly self-forgetfully)—"I see a—great deal in this simple circumstance; and for Tartan's sake"—(the distinguished Captain Greville was brought very low)—"you will not say Nay to the owner of the button?"

Miss Crawshay, regardless of her æsthetical costume, caught Tartan up, and whispered in happy confusion in his feathered ear:

"We never could say Nay to a demi-god, could we, Tartan?"

DULCIBELLA.

MY horse was dead beat and its driver, I suspected, had imbibed a good deal too much. I *hoped* he was taking me in the right direction, but had my misgivings. You see I was new to London at that time and quite incapable of giving him positive instructions as to the way he should go—even if he would have paid any attention to them. It was exasperating. Here was the evening slipping fast away, and I had particularly wished to be early at the Tylers' At Home. I wanted to see something of my old chum Wat and his wife, the "little country beauty," of whom he had been wont to rave once upon a time. She had been out when I called on arriving in town.

It was getting later and later. On we jogged through miles and miles, as it seemed, of unrecognisable streets and squares. Threats and expostulations were alike unavailing with Cabby.

Goliath Square, at last, thank goodness! and—after driving three times round it—Gath Street. A line of carriages, a distant sound of the cornet in the Myosotis valse, a house in a general state of illumination—there we were at last. I thankfully paid and dismissed Cabby, and two minutes later found myself in the centre of a surging mass of brilliant toilettes ascending the staircase by slow degrees.

On the landing I paused to bow and murmur an inane something to a peacock-green-and-gold hostess "Watty's sweet country maiden, his little Lucy!" thought I with inward amazement, as I contemplated the dark, stout, sleepy, Israelitish belle before me. "Forty, if she's a day. Twelve stone, if she weighs an ounce. Where's Watty, I wonder?"

The music in the adjoining apartment ceased, and there was an outward rush of dancers.

"Matilda, my dear, you should keep this husband of yours in better order! Such things he has been saying," giggled a sportive old lady in gorgeous apparel to my hostess. "I *said* I'd tell you."

"*Don't*, Mrs. Bowker! *Don't* destroy our domestic peace," said a stout, bald gentleman in a white waistcoat, with feigned agonies of apprehension. "Hullo, Marmaduke!—You haven't seen our boy, Marmy, since he went to college, have you, Mrs. Bowker?"

A slim and supercilious youth approached and bowed. I stared in dumb dismay. Matilda? The bald-headed man? "Our boy, Marmy"? What did it all mean? A ghastly suspicion dawned on me and fast grew to a certainty. *I was in the wrong house.* What should I do? What *did* people do in such circumstances? To bolt insanely was my first impulse, but wiser thoughts prevailed. I would face it out for ten minutes longer, and then leave in time to present myself at the Tylers'. My hostess evidently considered me one of

Marmaduke's undistinguishable gentlemen friends ; Marmaduke most likely thought me one of his mother's acquaintances. Meanwhile, for fear of accidents, I had better keep clear of meeting Marmaduke and his mother together.

I sauntered into the ball-room and amused myself by sorting out Marmaduke's set and his mother's. The dance ended. "May I introduce you to a partner for the next?" drawled someone unexpectedly at my elbow. "Mr.—a—a—?" "Smith," I suggested ; "thanks, I don't valse." "It's a square," said Marmaduke. I felt the necessity of awakening no suspicion, so I resignedly followed him to the other end of the room, where sat in low meditation a superior creature in spectacles and cropped hair. "Thanks. She was engaged for the next, but any other." I hate grasping girls, so I took her card, a blank with one exception, and inscribed my name against a dance at a safe distance; and then, with a thankful heart, turned to retreat, when I found myself face to face with My Destiny.

Yes, there she was, in white, with a crown of daisies and buttercups, and the sweetest, most bewitching of dear little faces, and brown curls about her ears, and wide open, innocent blue eyes, looking full at *me*—the darling ! I seized on Marmaduke. "The young lady—in the window—introduce me, will you?" I stammered.

"With pleasha," said he, as coolly as if I had asked him for change for five shillings, instead of a passport to paradise.

"No, she was *not* engaged, but she *hated* quadrilles."

"So do I," I replied confidentially, and immediately appropriated the seat next hers. On the other side was a drowsy, inattentive chaperon in ruby velvet. We were practically tête-à-tête. Ah, those Lancers ! Shall I ever hear them again without being haunted by the artless little stream of chatter to which they played the accompaniment? So young, so fresh, so unsophisticated ! She told me all about her home in the country, her pony, her lessons and her cross governess who led her such a life about speaking French ; about Bobby, and the scrapes Bobby got into in his holidays ; and how capitally Bobby could imitate Mademoiselle being frightened by a cow. Bobby was the vicar's son ; I *hated* him, though he was but fourteen. I drew her out, of course, but then she drew *me* out too. I had never been so brilliant, so eloquent, in all my life. I felt the courage of a man in a mask.

It was a shame to impose on her (my name is *not* Smith), but I meant to make full confession by-and-bye. A fiend in human form appeared to spoil our happiness, and carried her off for a polka. Never mind; *I* had the next dance and could stand and gaze at her meanwhile.

Quoth one old lady at my elbow to another: "Nice little thing she seems. I didn't think she was out."

"Oh, *dear* no. Her aunt Jane begged to be allowed to bring her here to-night just for once. They all leave town to-morrow."

"Quite an heiress, isn't she?" "Old —— (I couldn't catch what,

it had four syllables, and sounded like Dickory Dock) died worth a quarter of a million, and she was his only grandchild."

They changed the conversation, stupid old things—but my dance was coming, and came at last. We valsed and valsed; her step and mine went as one; then I took her for an ice; and then we sat and talked in the conservatory—an excrescence over the portico where there was just room for us two and a chinese lantern.

"This was her first ball—and her last," with a deep, deep sigh. "She liked it?" "Oh! so much now—not at first, before she knew anybody. Papa wouldn't let her go out any more—he hated balls himself, but liked company at home." "Might *I* come and see her?" "Oh, yes. She was *sure* I might. She would introduce me to Aunt Jane presently. Didn't I even know her name? How absurd! It was—Did I wish to hear her Christian and surname?" "Most certainly I did." "Well, then—now I wouldn't think it silly—Dulcibella. Did I like it?" "*Like* it? I thought it *lovely!*" "Did I like Dulcie or Bella best, for short?" "Dulcie," I thought. So did she, but everybody *would* call her Bella.

"Might *I* call her Dulcie—some day?" "Well, perhaps—perhaps—How *silly* I was! What was *my* name? Something *horrid* she was sure." "Gerald St. Alban." "No, *really? How* pretty!" "Did she think *Mrs.* Gerald St. Alban sounded as pretty?" "Of course, she did. Was it *really* and *truly* my name, and had I a wife?" "No, I hadn't a wife. I never might have a wife, for I never could, would, or should *think* of anyone in the world ——"

Here Marmaduke stuck his simpering little face in on us.

"*Our* dance, I think," presenting his elbow to Dulcie.

So off she went with a sad look in her pretty blue eyes, and I stayed behind gaping ecstatically at the chinese lantern, like a love-stricken young idiot, as I was.

I heard the music ceasing and emerged into the ball-room. There, at the far end, was Dulcibella and Aunt Jane's red satin back bowing adieu to our hostess. I made a desperate dash across the formidable vacant centre space. A little knot of two or three couples intercepted me. Dulcibella's daisies and butter-cups were just visible descending the stairs. I struggled frantically after them.

They were at the front door when I reached the hall. I seized a hat, any hat, no matter who's, a carriage door banged—I dashed out and upset a mob of small boys—the carriage lamps were twinkling far down the street—I ran and ran—the carriage turned a corner—I turned a corner too—there it was ahead—an intelligent hansom overtook me. I sprang in, pointing breathlessly to the carriage. "All right, sir!" and away we went, now losing, now gaining, now almost up with them, now lost altogether, and the hansom stopped at the far side of Philistia Park, miles away from everywhere.

"My horse can't do no more, sir. Thirty shillings if *you* please, and not much for a fancy job like this."

What can I do? I've advertised in the Agony Column:

"Dulcie. Pray, pray, send your address to Gerald, at Messrs. So and So."

"First Ball. Are we *never* to meet again. G. St. A. Send address &c., &c."

I've gone vainly through the Court Guide and London Directory in search of names that sound like Dickory Dock (but *that* might have belonged to her maternal grandfather after all). I've consulted a Private Inquiry office. I've haunted town till I'm supposed to be a detective myself. The Wat Tylers declare that there was no ball in Gath Street that night but their own. Can it have been a dream? Was I never received by Matilda and introduced by Marmaduke to the severe young person in spectacles?

I shall go mad if this uncertainty continues. Editor! Reader! Help me. Think over all your acquaintance and if you know a stout gentleman in a white waistcoat, with a son at college and a wife addicted to green-and-gold, called Matilda, just ask them if they don't remember Smith who came uninvited to their ball on the fifth of last May, and implore them to tell him for pity's sake Who and Where is Dulcibella?

THE POET OF THE FUTURE.

WHERE is he who shall sing when we are gone?
And what is teaching him?
Are they pleasant fields that he gazes on?
Or city byways dim?

Has he a home where they love and praise?
Is he a lonely boy?
Does he know the rich man's levelled ways?
Or poor folks' rugged joy?

Whose is the word that shall wake his mind,
And give his life its aim?
Where is the maid whom his heart shall find?
What is his comrade's name?

God knows the boy who shall some day sing,
And what his songs shall be.
But the blessing or curse that he shall bring
May rest with you or me!

I. F. M.

R. AND E. TAYLOR. M. ELLEN STAPLES.

SHE MET HIS GLANCE DEFIANTLY, BUT ALREADY HER COURAGE BEGAN TO FAIL HER.

THE ARGOSY.

AUGUST, 1883.

WINIFRED POWER.

CHAPTER XXII.

MRS. HATHERLEY'S REVENGE.

SIR JOHN HATHERLEY'S butler slept just under the library; Mark Hatherley just above it. The latter had been sitting up writing; the former was roused by the first noise of struggle in the library. He had risen in haste, when the crash further alarmed him. It also startled Mark. Both had seized a light. One ascended; the other descended; and now, profoundly astonished, both stood confronting the two frantic women.

"What on earth is the matter?" enquired Mark.

Gertrude, as pale as a sheet with anger, shrugged her shoulders scornfully, and remained silent.

"Look!" raved Mrs. Hatherley. "The receipt—for the Psalter—Richard Dallas—my Willie innocent! Lady Hatherley, I ——" She stopped, fairly choked with fury and asthma. She could speak no more, but with outstretched, shaking hands, with blazing eyes, and quivering form, still stood mutely denouncing.

"May I see?" said Mark, quietly, and approached Lady Hatherley. She still held the paper crushed in her hand; but now, at his request, relinquished it. He held it up to the light and read it, surprise not unmixed with sternness slowly gathering over his features as he did so.

"Will you come into the library?" he said, briefly. "You also, Aunt Laura. Rawlins, I think you need not wait." And Rawlins retired, as impassive as though he had been destiny incorporate, instead of a mere amazed spectator of it.

Mark led the way into the library and installed himself in an arm-chair.

"And now, will you explain what all this means?" he said quietly.

Thus admonished, Mrs. Hatherley started off instantaneously upon a rambling, excited statement of how she had followed Gertrude

downstairs, watched her proceedings at the bureau, and pounced upon her finally in the moment of her finding the receipt.

"My Willie was calumniated to shield the guilty. The receipt mentions Richard Dallas; therefore, the Psalter was sold by him. He was not the thief, but the thief's accomplice. He doubtless divided the spoils; and the instigator of his deed stands *there*." And she almost cast herself anew upon Gertrude. But Mark took her firmly by the two wrists and forced her quietly into a seat.

"Before making such statements, Aunt Laura, you should be prepared with proofs," he said, with stern rebuke.

"Proofs?" shrieked Mrs. Hatherley. "The proof lies in that paper. No doubt one day her husband, or somebody else, surprised her with the receipt in her hand; she thrust it into the bureau, and now, like a thief in the night, has crept down to regain possession of it."

Then, for the first time Gertrude broke silence.

"I found the receipt by accident in a secret drawer of which I had never before discovered the existence. I was dumbfounded when I saw it."

She spoke with contemptuous calm, and pointed towards the open bureau. Mark turned to look at it. There, indeed, gaped a small receptacle which was as new to him as to anybody.

"Do you not think it much more likely that my father himself put the receipt in that hiding-place? Very probably he alone knew of such a drawer," he said, still quietly addressing his aunt.

"Then he had discovered the theft and sought to shield her," panted Mrs. Hatherley.

She was exasperated at Mark's calm. Could he also intend to take part with the enemy? Was her prey after all to escape her? At the bare idea she began to sob hysterically. Mark rose to put an end to the scene. He did not understand the affair of the receipt, nor very earnestly wish to understand it. He had many vague floating suspicions, but one recurred more frequently and grew every moment more coherent than all the rest. In any case, however, the business concerned his father more than himself, and he wished to have as little to do with it as possible. When Mrs. Hatherley saw him deliberately locking up the bureau and preparing to depart, her angry consternation knew no bounds. Was nothing to be done to that woman, standing there in her insolent calm and galling beauty? Were no questions to be asked of her; no humiliation apportioned; no punishment inflicted? Half goaded to madness, she turned upon her savagely.

"You do not speak because you dare not," she cried. "If you were one whit less cunning or less shameless, you would seek by some falsehood to explain your presence here to-night."

"I came to seek for a paper," answered Gertrude, haughtily. "Not the one you think, for I did not know of its existence. I

waited till my husband was asleep, and abstracted the keys from beneath his pillow. I shall explain nothing; extenuate nothing; far less shall I deny. My act was mean—it was not criminal. You may blazon it for your satisfaction over Elmsleigh to-morrow." And with one parting, defiant glance, she swept from the room.

"When I think —— " began Mrs. Hatherley.

"Think nothing," Mark interrupted curtly. "I am going back to my room. I do not know what you intend to do, Aunt Laura, but I should advise you to follow my example." He paused for an instant; but as no answer came from her petrified lips, he coolly deposited the lamp upon the table for her, and wended his own way upstairs through the first faint glimmer of the dawn.

Mrs. Hatherley stood rooted to the ground. Then as all her disappointment, all her baffled rage, her foiled revenge, her useless craft and wasted patience swept over her in a flood of recollection, she clasped her hands above her head and sent a cry into the lonely stillness that was like the shriek of some wild, wounded animal. She staggered backwards, clutched vainly at the table for support, and fell in a heap to the ground. There the excellent Rawlins, fated to have little slumber that night, found her in a profound faint. And thence, thinking that Pandemonium was let loose upon the family, he conveyed her to her bedroom, and summoned a maid to her assistance. Florence was also roused; Mark got little more rest; a doctor was sent for, and the whole household was soon astir. Only Sir John still slept on, until at last his stertorous breathing drew the attention of his startled wife. Then Dr. Hervey was summoned from Mrs. Hatherley's bedside and brought into his room.

And when all Elmsleigh sat down to breakfast that morning, it was regaled through the newspapers with one piece of news, and through the peripatetic baker and butcher-boys with another. The first was that the Aztec Mine Company had fraudulently collapsed. The other was that Sir John Hatherley had had a paralytic seizure in the night and was not going to recover.

This, however, turned out to be a mistake. A seizure he had indeed had, but not a severe one. In fact, his consciousness soon returned, and he did the greatest honour to Dr. Hervey's remedies. But he was ordered unbroken quiet, and lay in a darkened chamber throughout the long hours of the day: while in the city, maddened speculators were cursing his name, and the women and children whom he had ruined were staring hunger in the face.

For the next two or three days, all the brunt of the disaster and all the shame of it fell upon Mark. He went about, very stern and pale; seeking counsel from few and comfort from none. They were very bitter hours for him; but since the blow was inevitable he was relieved that it had fallen. And some small solace he found in the reflection that his hands at last were free to act as he thought fittest.

Late in the afternoon of the day following the eventful night, Gertrude met Mark in the corridor. For more than twelve hours they had hardly exchanged a word, but now she stopped him.

"I telegraphed this morning to my brother, Richard Dallas, to ask for an explanation of that receipt," she said. "I have had no answer. I suppose it will come soon."

"I dare say it will," Mark answered kindly rather than otherwise, for he was struck with her pallor and exhausted air.

"I had nothing to do with the missing Psalter," Lady Hatherley added, after a pause. After all, it was this which she most wished to say to him, for her pride had been humiliated by his discovery of her clandestine visit to the library, and from unjust suspicion she at least wished to free herself in his eyes.

"I never thought you had anything to do with it," Mark replied, gravely. "Have you heard the news? Do you know that if my father is not ruined, he should be?"

"I am almost glad," said Gertrude.

"Glad?"

"Yes, glad. Some things which look like punishment come as a release from bondage, you know," she answered, quietly; then, almost before he knew it, had left his side. She was truer, perhaps, in these moments than she had ever been in all her life. What was most womanly in her was touched by Sir John's helpless condition; what was most practical was called forth by the need of tending him. Moreover, her brain, ever busy, had already outstripped the sordid present and was hastening towards the changed life beyond. She would quit Elmsleigh and the people who irritated and bored her. And though there might be discomfort to endure, it would be discomfort mixed with novelty; and to Gertrude it always seemed as though change were the one thing necessary for freeing her imprisoned spirit.

Meanwhile rumour was extremely busy with her name. Mrs. Hatherley had not been silent; and the butler, though grave as a court chamberlain upstairs, had not been able to resist the temptation of taking his fellow-servants into his confidence. Mrs. Hatherley had never been above such small arts as ingratiate domestics, and she was far more popular in the servants'-hall than the disdainful young mistress. Public opinion, with its queer logic, thought much less ill of her for spying at Gertrude's actions, than with Gertrude for rummaging among her husband's drawers. A garbled account of the scene in the library, mixed with a still more imperfect report of some letter addressed to Lady Hatherley, got abroad, and, while blackening Gertrude, it exalted Mrs. Hatherley. The latter and Florence found themselves almost as popular as in the halcyon days succeeding the news of Sir John's engagement. Day after day they set out upon a sociable round of visits; and wherever they appeared were welcome. Most fervent among their partisans was Mrs. Burton.

"When I think," said that virtuous and perspicacious lady, "when I think of how I ever mistrusted Sir John, I am really almost tempted to pronounce myself inspired."

"We are fortunate in the possession in our midst of so much infallibility," remarked someone; but it was only a brute of a man.

"I am not clever," continued Mrs. Burton; "and I have often regretted it; although I must own that with the present dreadful notions prevailing among intellectual people everywhere, I feel inclined to place the *heart* above the *head.* But as I was saying, I am not clever."

"La!" cried Flossie. "When you first came here you said there was not a creature fit to exchange an idea with."

"You sweet, impertinent pet," replied Mrs. Burton, fondly. "I think you *must* have misunderstood me. One of the reasons why I finally made up my mind to separate from my darling daughter and marry Mr. Burton was, because I felt that, with my deficiencies, the thing I was best fitted for was parish work. There I could be guided and instructed. There, working under a superior intellect, I could be *useful.*"

It is to be presumed that the idea of Mr. Burton's superior intellect was so new as to strike everybody dumb with surprise. For after looking sweetly round the circle for an answer and receiving none, Mrs. Burton continued:

"No. I have few gifts. We cannot all be talented; and talent is often a snare. But if there be one thing in which I think I may claim some small power, it is in the divination of character. Even this I should hardly venture to say of myself, only that I have been sometimes told it."

"I shouldn't have said you were penetrating," drawled Mrs. Hatherley, with her best air of stupidity.

"No?" said Mrs. Burton, and put her golden head on one side, like a bird contemplating a worm. "No? That is what Mr. Burton often says. I look so innocent, he tells me. But you must all take care; I am deeper than I seem. And from the very first moment I saw through Sir John; through him, and through that shameless girl, Gertrude Dallas."

Mrs. Burton was fortunate in her subject. Gertrude was now so thoroughly detested that people were anxious to abuse her. And this anxiety left nobody leisure to be critical. Consequently Mrs. Burton's statements about her own insight passed unchallenged, and the tide of gossip flowed on.

While Elmsleigh talked, and Sir John grew slowly better, and the law wove its toils about him, and even sent down its agents to The Limes there to await his recovery, Mark was making one discovery after another. To the proud young man, a little stern hitherto in his own unstained integrity, such disgrace as awaited him, and even now made itself apparent in his father's ruin, was hard enough to

bear. But what rendered the burden of it almost intolerable was to find how deliberately planned and steadily carried out had been Sir John's deception of his family and the world. And the meanness of the modes employed by him was only equalled by the sordidness of the ends pursued.

"To play with loaded dice for such a stake!" was often Mark's reflection, on finding that constantly Sir John had sacrificed some scheme of financial success to the paltry theatricism of his social life. He had made one or two good coups; had one or two strokes of luck, and for a certain number of years had been rich indeed. But a corroding spirit of indolence was in him; and an empty vanity that made him cling to shows and gewgaws. In a word, he had one of the natures which a public admiration intoxicates, without the energy to play even momentarily an exalted part. Everything about him, as Mark bit by bit discovered, was tinsel, sham, pretence. To stay the increasing clamour of his creditors, and blind the world to the final proof of his insolvency, there had been no craft which he had not resorted to. The very money for his marriage he had obtained by the secret sale of his plate; and the diamonds—the famous diamonds—which he had bestowed upon his bride were paste! A masquerade, so prolonged and so unworthy, propped up by such devices and maintained with a perseverance so insane, would have been ludicrous, if for Mark it had not been tragical.

"Your diamonds are false," said Mark to Gertrude, on returning the parure after having borrowed it to test them. Her eyes flashed with anger for a second. To know herself deluded even here was bitter.

"If they had been genuine, I should have asked you to surrender them," continued Mark, in a low tone. "They were bought at a time when all my father's money was due to those who had trusted him." He had trained himself to say these things calmly, but even yet a change in his voice showed how much the calmness cost him.

Gertrude was touched. She hesitated for a moment, the cynicism of years struggling in her with one of her impulses of generosity. Then, suddenly she snatched the rings from her fingers, the diamonds from her ears, and cast them in a glittering little heap on the table. These at least were real; it had been one of Sir John's devices to take care of that.

"Please sell them," she said, "and give the money to whom you please. It won't be much, but it is all I have." And before, surprised and a little pleased, he could find words to reject her sacrifice, she hastily left the room.

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Hatherley, meeting Gertrude five minutes later in the corridor. "What have you done with your earrings? And your rings too?"

"I have given them away," said Gertrude, contemptuously.

"Given them away. Nonsense!" Mrs. Hatherley looked extremely incredulous.

"It is quite true, I assure you," retorted Lady Hatherley, insolently. "I generally tell you the truth. There are people who are not worth the intellectual effort implied in a plausible lie."

Gertrude's tongue was a scorpion-whip in these days to Mrs. Hatherley. She did not often speak to her, but when she did every word cut like a lash. The creole quivered with mortification as much as resentment.

"Your brother has never answered your telegram, I believe?" she called after her enemy, by way of a Parthian shot.

Gertrude merely shrugged her shoulders and went on her way. It was quite true that Dick had not telegraphed, although her own message had been sent two days ago. The explanation of the sold Psalter had become so obvious since that she had hardly reflected on her brother's silence; but now she came to think of it, she did find it strange, and she resolved to write to Paris on the morrow.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE WATCHES OF THE NIGHT.

About half an hour later on the same afternoon, Flossie, her small bright eyes, like black beads, sparkling with excitement, bounded upstairs, and burst panting into her mother's room.

"I thought I should never be released. He is only just gone," she said, graphically but incoherently, and subsided into the nearest chair.

"Released? From where? *Who* is only just gone?" asked Mrs. Hatherley, with impatience.

"Her visitor." The personal and possessive pronouns, anonymously used by the widow and her daughter, invariably meant Gertrude.

"Has she had a visitor?"

Flossie nodded portentously.

"A man, mamma! The man from Harwich."

"O——h!" If Harwich had been Broadmoor, Mrs. Hatherley could not have looked more scandalised—or gratified. "How do you know, Flossie?"

At this point Flossie showed some slight signs of embarrassment.

"Well, you see," she began, slowly, "I—I chanced to see him come. I was *going* into the garden—so—and of course I went. And I wanted to look at the Gloire de Dijon under the library window."

Here she paused. She was nothing but a little spy; and she knew it, and her mother knew it. But though education had not suppressed her natural proclivities, it had made her the least bit in the world ashamed of them.

"I see," said Mrs. Hatherley, carelessly. "And I suppose the window was open?"

"Yes. And so of course I could not help hearing *a little.*"

"Of course not." Mrs. Hatherley's feet began to beat a small tattoo of impatience.

"But I did not hear much," continued Flossie, and looked this time, to do her justice, very frankly aggrieved. "Only a few words."

"And what were they?"

"He said: 'Look here, Gerty, you know I *must* have money. The journey from Harwich cleared me out. Can't you sell something—or give me even a ring?'"

"Go on." Mrs. Hatherley was sitting bolt upright now, from sheer excess of eagerness.

"That was all," said Flossie, dolorously. "She came and shut the window. I had only just time to hide myself; otherwise she would have said I was listening—spiteful thing!"

"Florence," exclaimed her mother, impressively, "the depth of depravity in that woman is a thing I never could have believed had I not seen it." She paused and looked so solemnly into Flossie's eyes that she brought tears of terrified excitement into them. "Do you know what she has done?"

"Oh, what?" Flossie nearly screamed. Had Gertrude murdered the man from Harwich and concealed his body beneath the library sofa?

"She has given him *all* her jewels," replied Mrs. Hatherley in a deep tone. "I chance to know it."

"Oh, my gracious!" exclaimed Flossie.

Now, this conclusion of Mrs. Hatherley's was really gratuitous, inasmuch as the interview in the library had obviously taken place after her own with Gertrude in the corridor. But to what conclusions will not the nimble female mind jump, when edged on by suspicion and inspired by spite? Mrs. Hatherley, ever since that delirious night in the library, had been suffering from pressure on the brain. Her jaundiced mind made her loftily disdainful of such futile particulars as dates and places. She had wanted to know why Gertrude had given away her trinkets. She had found a plausible explanation. It did not fit. But that was no matter. It was an explanation all the same, and a compromising one to the enemy.

That night when Gertrude went in as usual to see Sir John, she was struck with the change in him. He looked older, feebler, and more shrunken than had yet been the case throughout his illness.

"Are you not so well?" she asked him, gently enough.

He lifted his hand to his head. "It is the pain here—here," he said, impatiently. "I cannot sleep. The room seems full of shadows, full of noises. Send for Hervey. I must have chloral."

She rang the bell to give the order. "You will let the nurse sit up with you to-night?"

"I will have no nurse, said her husband, in a tone of irritation. He had taken a dislike to the woman and driven her away

an early stage in his illness, but she had remained in the house all the same. The recovery was not complete.

"Then I will stay with you," said Gertrude. She had a curious dislike to be alone with him, her overwrought nerves and deep aversion struggling constantly in her with a woman's sense of duty to the helpless. Nevertheless, she would sit up with him if nobody else did.

"Yes, stay, child. It is not much to ask. You are sorry for me, are you not?" asked the old man. In truth he looked old now.

The suddenness of the question took her by surprise. It was the first time he had ever made any direct personal appeal of the sort to his wife. Generally his selfishness was too profound, his craft too cold to feel the need of sympathy. She stood silent, not knowing what to answer. Did she feel sorry for it, this grey head laid low in weakness and branded with disgrace? In such an unlovely old age lie few elements of pathos, unless it be the pathos of Nature's eternal irony.

Her silence struck him at last. Perhaps it made the loneliness of his empty heart seem greater. At any rate, he looked up and stretched out his shaking hand. "No answer, my dear? Are you glad, then, to see me thus?"

"Glad!" Gertrude echoed the word in a stifled voice. With a shudder as much of awe as repulsion, she forced herself to lay her own hand in his chill and feeble grasp. Her whole being was in revolt: nevertheless some unknown power, the majesty of a Presence, unseen, unheard, yet felt, drew her shrinking spirit forward to the verge of a great renunciation.

"I am old—and ill. You see that I am ill," he continued, with a strange eagerness. "I dare say I shall never be strong again, though I may live for years. I—I know what has happened ——" here his grasp of her fingers tightened, and his voice sank to a slow whisper. "I have heard them talking, and I know I am ruined. But they will not touch me—not a poor old sick man like me. I shall be free—but I shall be lonely. Mark will go away. Those others also. But you will stay, my dear? You are young, you are strong. And I have never been unkind to you."

Gertrude only answered with a dumb, agonised sob. She felt a very vertigo of self-sacrifice draw her on to give the promise he required of her; yet she knew that when the time came her soul would be filled with revolt.

"If you desert me, you, my wife, who will be true to me? Not Mark. Listen, Gertrude; I will tell you something. I am afraid of Mark. Afraid, do you hear? He is so sternly honest. He does not understand. He will take everything from me, and leave me a poor man, destitute and lonely. Everybody will be unkind to me if you leave me," he continued, clutching at her dress now with his other hand. "No one will touch me when you are there. Promise,

Gertrude, promise! Remember that you have sworn to obey me."

"I promise," she said at last, putting her hand up to her throat the while, as though she drew her breath in pain.

"We will go away, then," he said, evidently pleased. "In a day or two, as soon as I am strong, we will start. Mark shall arrange everything for me here. I cannot be troubled. I am too weak. We will live somewhere quietly, with nobody to worry us. And I will not use you ill, my dear. I never have—have I?"

"No," she answered him mechanically, the only sense alive in her a feeling of dull torture. She sat there while he dropped again into uneasy slumber; and every minute, marked merely by the vibration of a soundless clock, seemed to strike like a hammer upon her throbbing brain. No sense of duty upheld her; for she had not yielded to any definite idea of right, but to a half hysterical pity for the old man's weakness. What was her life henceforth to be, chained by the fetters she herself had forged? This question returned again and again to her mind with a dreary iteration.

He woke again in half-an-hour or so, with a start. "Is Hervey not there? I cannot sleep. Will no one send for Hervey?"

"I have sent. He will soon be here. He was engaged," answered Gertrude.

Sir John turned continually from side to side. He was evidently suffering from that painful excitability of the brain when ideas present themselves only in fragments, and the mind is full of disconnected images.

"Chloral. I want chloral," he perpetually muttered; until at last Gertrude could stand it no longer, and rose to call Mark. She had hardly reached the door, when she met a servant, followed by Dr. Hervey.

"I am so glad you came. I could not have stayed there another minute," she said, with unwitting eagerness, her mind so overstrained that she was not even aware of being excited.

The Doctor looked at her in some surprise and pity, struck by her deadly paleness and the hunted expression of her eyes. "Is Sir John violent?" he asked hastily, and pressed forward without waiting for an answer. The idea of this possible new development of the malady had suddenly presented itself to him; and he was consequently a little astonished, as well as relieved, to find the patient lying there so quietly. But his professional glance grew grave as he noted the ceaseless, aimless movement of the feeble hands, and heard the rapid, eager tone, in which Sir John said, "Chloral, Hervey; I must have chloral. I cannot sleep."

Now, Dr. Hervey had a great objection to narcotics: it was one of his peculiarities. Consequently he stood silent and doubtful; and finally began to suggest something else.

"No, no; chloral I tell you. It is the only thing that agrees with me; the only thing I will take," reiterated Sir John.

"Well, only one dose then," replied the doctor, reluctantly. "In compliance with Lady Hatherley's message, and as it was already so late, I brought a bottle with me. It contains three doses, but you must only take one."

"All right, only one. Don't look so grave, Hervey. I am not a baby, nor so weak that a narcotic will kill me. Did I not sit up to-day? And even walk?"

"Humph!" said the doctor for all reply. He did not speak his secret thought. It was that Sir John's manner was much less calm than he liked. The very freedom of his address was so unlike his usual slightly pompous and dignified utterances.

However, since chloral alone would satisfy him, then chloral he must have. "But remember, only one dose, Lady Hatherley," said the doctor. "And if that fails to put him to sleep, which is likely enough in his present state; without my seeing him; you must not repeat it. Who is going to sit up with him?"

"I am," said Gertrude.

"You look anything but fit for it. Have you been much fatigued?"

"No," she answered, turning away, a little fretted by his questioning.

Dr. Hervey did not like short answers; moreover, in common with most people in Elmsleigh, he was prejudiced against Sir John's young wife. Wherefore "Rude!" was his mental comment on her manner.

"Lady Hatherley seems very much fatigued," he remarked a few minutes later in the corridor to a group composed of Mark, Mrs. Hatherley, and the rejected nurse. "Surely it would be better for Mrs. Wilson, here, to sit up to-night."

"My father does not wish it," replied Mark, with his quiet decision.

"We know why!" interpolated Mrs. Hatherley, with a slight toss of the head, promptly copied by Mrs. Wilson. The nurse and Mrs. Hatherley had become great allies, and the former was intimately convinced that an upstart minx like Lady Hatherley could alone have prejudiced Sir John against so estimable a person as herself.

Dr. Hervey's eyes, with a quick, inquisitive twinkle in them, travelled from one to the other. The widow and Mrs. Wilson looked unutterable things.

"What these women are!" said the doctor, on his way home, to himself, with all that proud consciousness of sagacity in regard to the fair sex which distinguishes a man who is himself habitually henpecked. "That good-looking young woman likes to do everything for the old fellow herself. Afraid of being cut out of his will? Shouldn't wonder. What they are! Crafty as the deuce where their own ends are concerned, and sieves for keeping other people's secrets. Lucky I never tell any of them anything."

Next morning at breakfast the worthy man of healing, perseveringly cross-questioned by his better-half, confided to her his views con-

cerning Lady Hatherley. "But of course you won't repeat what I say, Maria. It is not often I am so indiscreet."

"You need not remind me of the reserve with which you usually treat me," replied Mrs. Hervey, resentment lending majesty to her speech. "I am not aware that I ever repeated one of the few confidences which you have condescended to make me."

And within an hour she had casually mentioned to half a dozen people that the Doctor had the worst possible opinion of Lady Hatherley: who, of course with some ulterior object, would allow nobody to approach Sir John but herself.

An hour after the chloral had been administered, the sick man's restlessness had not diminished, but increased. Gertrude who had very little experience of illness, and the morbid sensitiveness to its manifestations of all excitable people, felt a longing that increased every moment in intensity to quiet this ceaseless movement of the hands, and still the low moaning. Always slightly predisposed to slight other people's opinions, she began to wonder if there were really any sense in Dr. Hervey's prohibition of the second dose. She presently heard Mark's voice in the adjoining sitting-room, where Mrs. Hatherley and the nurse were still in confidential conclave, and went in to ask his advice. Needless to say that it was emphatically in favour of obedience to the doctor. Gertrude looked disappointed.

"This restlessness must be much worse for him than anything else."

"I dare say it is a common symptom. Is it not, Mrs. Wilson?" continued Mark, appealing to the nurse.

"I have always understood, sir, that a doctor's orders must go before everything. But in this case I really must decline all responsibility," added that worthy woman.

Mark turned from her. "You had better not give the chloral, I think," he said to Gertrude.

"It's here, my lady; on that table yonder. I thought it best to bring it away when the doctor put it into my hand. But I can give it back to you, my lady, if you wish."

"What is the use of giving it back to me, when Sir John is not to take it?" answered Gertrude irritably, as she left the room.

Mark followed her. "You look very tired, Lady Hatherley. Could not I sit up the rest of the night?"

"No, no. Let me do it. I must, I must," she answered, clasping and unclasping her burning hands.

"I can lie down on the sofa here, my lady, so as to be easily called if *you* require me," interposed the nurse, standing in the doorway.

"I shall want nothing. And if I do, what is it to walk to the end of the corridor to rouse you?" replied Gertrude, hardly more amiably than before, for the woman's resentful obsequiousness annoyed her.

She went back into the bedroom and resumed her weary watch.

He was quieter now, she noticed, with relief; not the pathetic relief of love, indeed, but a thankfulness for the cessation of a painful phenomenon. She lay back in her arm-chair and raised her hands to her own throbbing temples. The pain there was intense; there was no fear of her sleeping with it, she thought. The minutes passed, made audible now by the loud ticking of the hall clock sounding through the hushed home. The shadows deepened in the large room, and the reflection of the night-light on the ceiling grew ruddier; a deeper darkness enwrapped the bed. Sir John was apparently asleep. To-morrow, said Gertrude to herself, he would probably be much better, and she smiled with a sad irony, thinking how many hearts the improvement, usually so joyfully hailed, would leave cold. She fell to musing. Her thoughts, released by the soothing silence from their tension, wandered aimlessly from one thing to another, from the past to the present. She had none of the carking anxiety which generally attends such watches as hers, and narrows every sense and feeling to one intense and sleepless flame-point of attention. Gradually, without noticing it, her muscles relaxed; the torpor succeeding to pain enveloped her brain. And she slumbered.

When she awoke again it was with a start, and a sense that some stir or summons had roused her. With some self-reproach, she started up. Had he called her?

The first faint glimmer of the dawn came through the closed shutters, and by it Gertrude dimly descried her husband lying partially crosswise, and with one hand on the table beside his bed. She rose and very gently moved him, as well as she could into an easier posture. His hand was a little cold, but not very. She covered it with the sheet. Then, noticing that a lock of his hair, that soft, beautiful, snow-white hair, that made him look like a bard, had fallen over his eyes she stroked it softly back. Involuntarily her fingers, moved by some tiny electrical wave of human sympathy, lingered for a second on the handsome but not noble brow. She was conscious, or fancied she was conscious, of some new solemnity in the picturesque head: doubtless it was the wan light that gave it.

Patiently she resumed her watch, shivering a little with the early chillness, and dreamily marking the dim procession of shadows on the walls called up by the growing brightness that struggled through every chink. They were rather ghostly, these shadows—to her fantastic imagination they were like a gathering of pallid visitants from Hades. After a while, they even struck her as uncanny. The sun must be fairly high in the heavens by now, she thought, hearing the sounds of awakened life through the house; and she longed for light and air, yet ventured not to stir, for fear of startling the sleeper.

Her foot accidentally struck an object on the carpet. It was hard, and she stooped to lift and to examine it. It was a small bottle: the

cork was out, the phial empty; and surely—yes, surely it smelt of chloral! Bewildered, she rose. Had not the nurse taken away the chloral? What had happened?

Sir John? He was very quiet—too quiet. She tremblingly laid her hand upon him; then drew back with a stifled cry. He was icy cold. Quick as thought, she flew to the nearest window and tore the shutters open. Then, with a shudder of dread, forced herself to turn and look. In the golden sunlight her husband's face was revealed to her, cold and grey. He was dead. So much she felt, though she had never before seen a corpse. Had he died while she slept? Had her carelessness killed him?

The very thought of all those hours passed unknowingly in the presence of Death, filled the excited woman with horror. She flew down the passage, calling: "Mark! Mark!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

WAS IT CHLORAL?

MARK, already dressed, came hastily out of his bedroom; Mrs. Hatherley's head appeared discreetly at the door of hers; several servants hurried to the scene, for Gertrude's call had carried consternation.

"Your father," she cried. "Quick! He is dead. He took an overdose of chloral, I think. Oh! why did I sleep?" She really was nearly beside herself, and stood wringing her hands in the midst of them all, able to think of nothing clearly, and shaken with the horror of her discovery.

Mark went into the silent chamber; issued again, however, before a minute had passed, looking very grave, but calm. "He is indeed dead. Let somebody go immediately for Dr. Hervey," he said in low, steady tones; then stayed by the door with the downcast eyes and compressed lips of one whose thoughts are various and solemn.

Some natural grief he felt at this tragically sudden snapping of the familiar life. Some sorrowful awe had filled him at the sight of the rigid form, so well-known, still untouched by corruption, yet already so mysteriously changed. And inevitable as his awe and his grief, stronger than either, was that vain but pathetic regret of the living for the words that may nevermore be spoken. But Mark in these latter days had felt too keenly the disgrace that had fallen on his father's name, and feared too strongly the punishment which might await him, not to have a sense of relief at the thought that Death had stayed the hand of Justice and must still the voice of reproach. Ah, better so! Since the inexorable hour must sound for all, would that for all it might sound so mercifully!

Mark was roused from his musing by a touch upon his arm. His

aunt stood beside him, her eyes bright with their well-known glitter of unutterable thoughts.

"Did you hear what she said, Mark?"

"She? Who?" he asked, half bewildered.

"*Who?* Lady Hatherley." The creole pointed to the door of the sitting-room whither Gertrude had betaken herself. "She said her husband took an over-dose of chloral *while she slept.*"

The emphasis with which these concluding words were spoken passed unheeded by Mark. He had grown indifferent to the widow's recent melodramatic ways. But her speech roused his interest. He entered the sitting-room; Mrs. Hatherley gliding after him, in her usual stealthy manner. Gertrude was sitting on a sofa, leaning back and with her hands crossed upon her knees in the attitude and with the look of a person whose mind is absorbed by one idea. She was outwardly much calmer than at first: but, questioned, began relating all she knew with a rapidity and concentrated eagerness that betrayed her real excitement.

"Do you think he drank the chloral while I slept?" she whispered, still pursued by that dreadful doubt.

"Perhaps he never drank it at all. You found the bottle on the floor. He may have swept it down with his hand," said Mark.

"Then what killed him?" asked Gertrude, quickly.

"Possibly a stroke. But there shall be a post-mortem examination if Dr. Hervey thinks that may be of use in the way of revelation," he answered, kindly. A thought of sad irony almost made him smile. Sir John had loved mystification. Was his final exit from the scene of his long comedy to be itself a riddle?

"I do not understand," began Mrs. Hatherley, slowly, "why the chloral bottle should have been by his bed at all. The nurse," she added more emphatically, "said she brought it away."

"True. In here." Mark started up and turned towards the table. There was indeed a bottle with a small quantity of a pale-coloured liquid in it, which was obviously *not* chloral.

"The stupid woman! she must have made a mistake," exclaimed Mark, addressing his aunt.

Mrs. Hatherley's eyelashes flicked. Presumably it was in assent, for further answer made she none. At this moment, Mrs. Wilson herself appeared; looking very portentous.

"What is this I hear, my lady?" she asked of Gertrude, with an air of judicial authority. The patient from whose presence she had been shut out, had died: did not such an occurrence invest herself with a kind of avenging majesty?

"Sir John is dead," Gertrude answered her; speaking simply, mechanically even, certainly not in the way in which, according to Mrs. Wilson's ideas, the widow of an hour should have answered.

The truth was, it never even occurred to Gertrude to feign any conventional sorrow. That particular kind of pretence was foreign

to her nature. Moreover it was the fact of the death and the mode of it which preoccupied her—preoccupied her morbidly; but not in any sense the loss to herself. How could she regret that which she had never loved?

"You seem to have committed a very strange act of carelessness last night, Mrs. Wilson," here observed Mark. "See here!" And he held up the bottle.

"What is that, sir?"

As Mark explained, Mrs. Wilson's cap-strings fluttered with the strength of her righteous but controlled indignation.

"I am not in the habit, sir, of making such mistakes. I do not think, sir, that I have ever been accused of such a thing before. I shall be very much surprised, sir, if you are able to prove that I did it now."

Mark suppressed an exclamation of impatience. "If you did not do it, who did?" he asked, in his brusque way.

"I do not know, sir, I am sure," replied Mrs. Wilson. "Perhaps somebody changed the bottle after I brought it in?"

Dr. Hervey was announced. He came in with his best air of professional concern; and seemed a little relieved at being able to put it away again on discovering that it was not greatly needed. Surely never had Death entered any house escorted by a more meagre chorus of woe. The highest pathos of the still figure lying in the next room there was the pathos of its unwept At Peace!

"He, poor fellow, seems to feel it the most of all," was Dr. Hervey's reflection while listening to Mark's story.

But at the mention of the chloral he forgot everything but his own indignation at his orders being disobeyed.

"Did I not say he was only to have one dose?" cried the doctor.

"If he took another it was while Lady Hatherley was asleep," said Mark.

"Asleep? Asleep! Nurses should not sleep," sharply commented Dr. Hervey, too much excited to weigh his words.

"At least if they do sleep, they are not generally considered very efficient," remarked Mrs. Wilson, addressing the observation to space.

Gertrude turned upon her angrily. "Good heavens! Do you suppose I slept on purpose?"

"I don't know, my lady, I am sure," replied Mrs. Wilson, respectfully.

"I will not be insulted," flamed out Gertrude, unwisely angry, as was her wont. "What do you mean, woman?"

"Is this a time to wrangle? Can no one talk common sense?" interposed Mark, distributing blame with manlike impartiality.

Gertrude rose and swept out of the room. She was outraged by insane suspicions, and even Mark would not defend her! Mrs. Hatherley and Mrs. Wilson exchanged a significant glance. Mark meanwhile led Dr. Hervey into the silent room.

"Was this just how you found him?"

"Yes. He has not been touched."

They spoke in whispers, and as little as possible. Dr. Hervey took up the empty bottle, looked at the label; shook his head. The dead man's face told no tales of how he met his end. If the mute chloral bottle were not a witness, then there was no other.

"Inconceivable carelessness! This comes, you see, of amateur nursing."

Mark made no answer, for he was not disposed to talk in that room. As his companion turned to leave, he lingered behind an instant to draw the sheet over the set face. Unlike most countenances which gain in majesty beneath the seal of Death, Sir John's had lost a great part of its beauty. An unconquerable meanness sat upon his brow.

When Mark returned to the sitting-room he found Dr. Hervey talking to the attentive Mrs. Hatherley and the nurse. "Short of a post-mortem examination," he was saying, "it must be impossible to know the truth."

"I wish for a post-mortem examination," observed Mark. "Can you perform it immediately?"

"Not before five o'clock. By-the-bye, Mrs. Wilson, it has just struck me that I put the chloral bottle into your hands last night after measuring the dose?"

"So you did, sir," answered the nurse, her looks fraught with unfathomable meaning.

"I did? Then why did you not take it away with you?"

"I took it away, sir. I laid it on that table." And Mrs. Wilson pointed to the other side of the room.

Dr. Hervey glanced at the spot indicated; saw the other bottle there, crossed the room and fetched it. "Why, this is lavender water."

"There was no lavender water there last night, sir."

"You mean, before you brought in what you supposed to be the chloral? Of course not. You clearly brought away the one for the other," remarked Dr. Hervey, waxing impatient at her Sybilline air.

"I don't think I did, sir," said the nurse, looking intensely aggrieved.

"It would be a very unusual mistake for a person of experience to make!" observed Mrs. Hatherley, impressively.

"May I ask you both to be so good as explain your meaning?" requested Dr. Hervey. He was a testy man, and riddles irritated him. Mark had been called out of the room by a servant; consequently he could not choke the enigma in its birth, as he would otherwise surely have done.

"Mean? Why, we don't mean anything, Doctor."

"Nothing whatever, sir, I am sure."

Mrs. Hatherley's eyes were rolling like a magician's; Mrs. Wilson's

were fixed demurely on the ground; Dr. Hervey's travelled from one to the other with growing exasperation.

"This is nonsense. Either you mean, Mrs. Wilson, that you did or you did *not* mistake one for another."

"I did not mistake it, sir. I believe I am not in the habit of doing such things. I brought away the chloral, sir, just as you gave it to me."

"In the name of patience then, my good woman, how do you account for the lavender water being there now?" And Dr. Hervey pointed to the table.

"I don't account for it, sir. The lavender water was in the bedroom last night."

"Then I suppose you mean me to infer that somebody else made the mistake?" said the doctor, after a reflective stare. A thin streak of insinuation, not to be called a smile, illumined the decorous impassiveness of Nurse Wilson's countenance.

"Why, yes, sir, if any mistake was made," she said, in a slightly dreamy way, as though her attention were principally absorbed by the pattern of the wall-paper, to which she had now transferred her attention.

"Any mistake?—Why, bless the woman! What—ah? To be sure," said Dr. Hervey, stumbling across an idea and picking it up briskly. "You *did* say, just now, that you brought the chloral in here yourself. And now you say *you* made no mistake. Am I to understand that somebody else changed the bottles after you went to bed?"

"Of course you are to," said Mrs. Hatherley, with so unusual an animation that her hearer looked as much surprised as if his umbrella handle had spoken. The nurse was still sadly musing.

"Then *who* changed the bottles?"

"I don't know, sir, I am sure," replied the nurse, for the third time within an hour.

Dr. Hervey's eyes sought Mrs. Hatherley's. "Who changed them?"

She shivered a little, like a cat when it first detects a mouse.

"Who was likely to do it?"

"Lady Hatherley sat up ——" Dr. Hervey paused in his speech; then anew burst out. "Do you think it was she?"

"Do you?" asked Mrs. Hatherley, gently.

A fresh silence, during which Nurse Wilson might have been a nun counting her beads. Mrs. Hatherley drew up her shawls and looked round for a fancied draught.

"Humph!" said the doctor. He rammed his hat over his brows, and stalked into the corridor; where he came across Mark. "If you don't stop the mouths of those two women, my dear fellow, there will be a rumpus of some sort, I can tell you. They insinuate that Lady Hatherley gave your father that second dose. She may have done it, of course; worn out by his importunity. I should take an early

occasion of learning the truth from her. That is, if the truth *can* be learnt from a woman."

"But she led me to suppose that he must have taken it, if at all, while she slept," said Mark.

"Well, go and question that pair in there. What women are!" repeated the doctor, as he went downstairs.

Very indignant, Mark walked into the sitting-room. "What is this I hear?" he began. "That you are insinuating things against Lady Hatherley—for which you can have no proof?"

"I, Mark?"

"I, sir?"

Astonished innocence was painted on both their countenances.

"You. Or you. It matters very little who said it, if it were once said by one of you and even tacitly confirmed by the other," Mark continued, severely. "You all heard what Lady Hatherley said this morning in the first outburst of her horror at finding my father dead. You have no right to attribute untruths to her even in your own minds; far less to give utterance to base suspicions. Remember that if I hear another word of this, I shall be extremely angry."

And thinking, poor fellow! like many a man before him, that such a threat must he thoroughly efficacious, Mark left them, and in five minutes had forgotten their insinuations.

All through the morning and afternoon people came to leave cards, and many of them were admitted to the darkened chamber where Mrs. Hatherley and Florence sat, exchanging exciting whispers in the semi-obscurity.

"How did it happen?" enquired Mrs. Burton, brimming over with the sympathy to which curiosity lends its keenest edge.

"Ah!" responded Mrs. Hatherley, and rolled her eyes.

Mrs. Burton edged a little closer. "Why, you don't mean to say ——? Dear me! Is there any mystery?"

"Mystery? The thing is *wrapped* in mystery," replied the widow, and expressively wrapped herself tighter in her shawl.

Mrs. Burton's pretty face, with its fringe of golden baby curls, was a study, all its features growing sharp with astonished new-born interest. "Do tell me," she said, coaxingly.

"No." Mrs. Hatherley firmly shook her head. "I have suffered, but I will be silent. Silent at all costs."

"Mamma!" ejaculated Flossie, a little alarmed at this unusual heroism.

"You might trust me," urged Mrs. Burton. "Am I not your friend, dearest Mrs. Hatherley? You know I would rather cut out my tongue than betray you."

Apparently this Spartan declaration had a slight effect. "Well—ask Mrs. Wilson what *she* thinks," said Mrs. Hatherley, playing carelessly with her fringes, and glancing at her visitor out of the corner of her eyes.

"But I don't know Mrs. Wilson, and she is only a nurse. And she isn't here. I think you might be kinder," added Mrs. Burton, looking a little inclined to pout.

"You promise not to tell—not to repeat what I say?"

"Yes."

This question and answer were exchanged in a rapid whisper, and now the widow and the Vicar's wife were sitting almost with the tips of their noses touching, and the black eyes seeming as if they were going to change places with the blue.

"It was—*an overdose* ——"

"Oh! I feel quite faint.—Of *what?*"

"Of *chloral!*"

"Goodness me! But then there is no mystery in it?"

"*Isn't* there!"

"Oh, *do* tell me, dear Mrs. Hatherley."

"The bottles were changed in the dead of the night," came the next creeping whisper.

Mrs. Burton shivered. "The dead of the night" fell with quite an uncanny effect upon her quivering nerves. "But who changed them?" she asked after a pause.

"That is the point," said Mrs. Hatherley.

"Dr. Hervey says it was Lady Hatherley," mercifully interposed Flossie, feeling quite sorry for Mrs. Burton. For she was a good-natured little thing at times, was Flossie.

"Exactly what I always thought," exclaimed Mrs. Burton triumphantly.

"Flossie, I did not say he *said* so, but only that he suggested it," remarked Mrs. Hatherley, reproving her daughter in haste.

"Oh! it doesn't matter. The secret is safe with me. I am as silent as the grave. Nobody ever accused me of tale-bearing. And of scandal I have a horror." Mrs. Burton stopped: and then went on again. "But to think of her being so soon unmasked. I always mistrusted her—always. There is something so false in her eyes. Well, good-bye, dear Mrs. Hatherley. Good-bye, my pet. You must come and spend a long day with me. I am sorry I cannot stay now, but I am *so* busy. Mr. Burton is a very hard task-master. But I don't complain. In such a wicked world, one is glad even of one's rare and few opportunities of doing good."

And with this pious reflection, Mrs. Burton embraced her dear friends fondly, tripped downstairs with a soft foot-fall, and on the doorstep met Mrs. Hervey.

"So I hear Dr. Hervey says that Lady Hatherley gave Sir John an overdose of chloral," were the first words she uttered.

"I think it very unlikely that Dr. Hervey would have committed himself to any such assertion," was Mrs. Hervey's stiff reply.

"Of course you won't admit it in so many words. But you know it is true and so do I," retorted Mrs. Burton, fascinatingly: and continued

her way. To the next person she met, she said : "Do you know that Sir John died of chloral given to him by Lady Hatherley? By mistake? Well, one must hope so. Dr. Hervey says there is no doubt about the fact. I have just met his wife, and she doesn't deny it."

The person favoured with this astounding piece of news, in her turn met a friend to whom, being prudent, she said simply : "Sir John, I hear on good authority, died of poison ; administered, it is hoped, by mistake."

Subsequently, the "poison" made a starting-point from which the report re-evolved itself into shapes of surprising complexity and novelty. Public curiosity became highly whetted. Everybody ran about to and from everybody else's house, talking, interrogating, contradicting, commenting, surmising. Some people who loved a mystery inclined to think that the poison had been given by an unknown hand. But they were in the minority, and most persons preferred to lay the blame on Gertrude. These again were divided into two camps; those who held that she had given it by mistake, and those who longed to say, but did not dare, that she had administered it on purpose.

While the storm raged, and gathered hourly in strength the longer it lasted, the unconscious woman over whose head it was brewing remained in her deserted chamber, a prey to the dumb fury of her own humiliated and baffled spirit.

To the formless horror caused in Gertrude's mind by the suddenness of her husband's death—had succeeded a rush of characteristic, unreasoning rage. To what had all her scheming brought her? Simply to an unpitied widowhood, ruined in purse, and now likely to be dishonoured in name. No remorse filled her at the reflection, but merely an extreme exasperation. She had played a losing game with fortune, and now the hour of her defeat had come. This was the point of view from which she looked at it, draping her thought, as always, somewhat melodramatically. Of course she thought herself a victim, and blamed Sir John, Mrs. Hatherley, Mark, her own people—everybody but herself.

She lay on her bed in the reckless abandonment of her angry idleness. What was she to do? "Work" would have suggested energy ; but Gertrude had no real energy, only occasional spasmodic impulses. She recoiled from the bare notion of exertion. Not that she would have admitted it—to anybody but herself, and not often even unto herself. But in this hour of isolation and despair, she did own to her own soul that she was a craven. Lying there in her gorgeous beauty and her splendid strength, she felt her heart cower within her at the idea of facing the world again, and especially in hardship and struggle. But the sense of her own weakness, instead of making her humbler, only provoked a fresh explosion of violence. The world was senseless ; she herself was cast amid idiots and dastards and windlers, and that and nothing else was the reason why she would go own to her grave a pauper.

The hours wore on. All at once it struck her that nobody had come near her. She was too hysterical to be hungry, and she did not want anything, but such neglect was not to be borne. She rose to her feet; rang the bell imperiously; and turned angrily to the maid who answered it.

"Why has no luncheon been brought to me?"

"You did not order it, my lady."

Something off-hand in the girl's manner increased Gertrude's anger. "Bring some cold meat immediately. Or stay—no. Give me my bonnet. I shall go out."

"Go out, my lady?" The maid nearly fainted. No widow of six hours' standing had ever gone walking in *her* decorous experience.

"What are you staring at, may I ask?" enquired Gertrude, with a flashing glance.

The maid paused. "I beg your pardon, my lady, but your bonnet's trimmed with *red*."

This shaft told. Gertrude all at once remembered that she was going to commit a glaring act of bad taste. She hesitated an instant, some remaining conventionality in her struggling with an insane desire to hurl her contempt in the teeth of Elmsleigh. Then, making up her mind, with trembling fingers and a face of set defiance she tied on her bonnet, fastened her mantle, and asked for her gloves.

"If anybody enquires for me, you can say I am gone for a walk," she said to the maid: who was too scandalised to make any reply.

Gertude turned, and swept downstairs like an empress. Several of the servants saw her, and stood rooted along the passage with amazement. Flossie gaped at her over the banisters and telegraphed to Mrs. Wilson to look also. Mrs. Wilson later averred that at the sight of such iniquity, her blood had curdled in her veins. But Gertrude held on her way undaunted; she was thoroughly natural, thoroughly herself for the first time since she had entered the once coveted, now hated house.

She walked slowly down the avenue of sweet-scented and rustling limes; then out into the road and past the rows of houses, whose inhabitants appeared at the windows to stare at her. She reached the common, and there was accosted by a respectably-dressed man, with a greyish beard, who said he had had nothing to eat for twenty-four hours. She drew out her purse, and emptied its contents, a few shillings, into his hand. She had no motive in doing this beyond a confused, perverse sense of general sympathy with those whom society rejects.

Her walk ended, she returned home. In the hall of The Limes, on entering, she found a group, composed of Dr. Hervey, Mark, Mrs. Hatherley and Flossie, and Mr. Burton. The butler and footman were also hovering about, preparing afternoon tea, for the hall was used as a kind of general sitting-room. As Gertrude advanced, everybody looked at her with hostile curiosity, mixed with such other

feelings as their various relations to her suggested. But Mark alone spoke, and it was in a tone of cold displeasure.

"You have been out, Lady Hatherley?"

"Yes. For a short walk. Why not?"

She met his glance defiantly enough, but already her courage began to fail her. Mark alone of all her world believed in her: what if he too should fall away. She was young and lonely enough to feel a stab of real pain at the thought.

"Why not?" repeated Mark. "I regret it," he said, icily.

She turned to the tea-table. "I am sorry if you think it wrong, but I really could bear the house no longer. I felt as if it were haunted."

"So it is," said Mrs. Hatherley, slowly. "Haunted with a mystery."

"A mystery?" Gertrude, holding a cup half-way to her mouth, repeated the word curiously.

"Dr. Hervey has just been telling us that the post-mortem examination has not revealed to him the true cause of my brother-in-law's —of your *husband's* death."

"What's that?" interposed Dr. Hervey, breaking off quickly in his conversation with Mr. Burton at the sound of his own name.—"Oh! the post-mortem.—Yes, indeed,—I wish the result had been clearer."

He was really only thinking of the medical aspect of the thing, but Mrs. Hatherley's eyes glittered with malignant exultation. Gertrude saw it; she noted, too, that the expression was reflected on Flossie's face; she detected it even in the demure inquisitiveness of the servants' glances; she fancied that from some suspicion akin to it even Mark's gravity was not free. What did they suspect in her? And she drank her tea in silence, although she was half-choked with indignation.

But what made her tremble, more than the anger, was the knowledge that her heart had sunk within her, chilled, for all its innocence, beneath the touch of Fear.

(To be continued.)

HAP AND MISHAP.

By C. J. Langston.

NOTHING seems more simple than to conduct the services, as by law established, in a country church without mistake or mishap; and yet I can truly say that considerable care and foresight may be necessary when a clergyman undertakes Sunday duty for another. And as this periodical is often to be found at the Parsonage, may I venture to give the result of my own experience and observation, together with certain useful hints and cautions to my clerical readers; whilst the following anecdotes may at the same time amuse my brethren of the laity.

To begin with vestments.

Beyond a stole and a hood it is not customary for a locum tenens to take anything to a fresh church. How often have I had reason to regret that I had not brought full canonicals? I was taking duty, for the first time, for a venerable clergyman well-known for ultra-evangelical principles, and a strict adherence to the Geneva gown in the pulpit. The prayers being over, the aged clerk had given out a fair measure of Tate and Brady, as in the good old times; and stopped to start the tune. Returning to the vestry, I prepared to put on the gown usually kept in a spacious cupboard. Oh, horror! the door was fastened beyond all the powers of Maskelyne and Cooke. I looked in vain for the key. I tried persuasion with a penknife and a halfpenny in the chinks. There was no response to my "open, Sesame." Time pressed; even Tate and Brady waned. The clerk came up the chancel prolonging the refrain of the last verse. What could I do? I could not explain that their dear rector had taken the key on a holiday trip. I delivered the sermon in a surplice. The people were shocked: some thought I was a wolf in sheep's clothing; others a Puseyite.

To find no vestments at all is a worse predicament. Last year I arrived at a neighbouring church, as usual, ten minutes before service. Waiting in a fireless vestry only large enough to squeeze in two doors and two windows, I thought: "Ah, they are keeping the surplice in a dry place, to be brought presently." The bell stops. Enter clerk. "Surplice, sir? why it must be forgot." He ran to the Rectory: searched "upstairs, downstairs, in my lady's chamber." Meanwhile, I was on thorns. Time up, and I *never* a moment late. The voluntary ceases; people look at each other; some whisper, "To be or not to be?" Must I enter the reading-desk habited in a frock coat. Another moment and I should have been in all the local papers—to say nothing of the *Church Times*. I tremble to think of it;—but the surplice came, and appearances were saved.

To those who do not wear a cassock the surplice itself is often a

perplexity. I have sometimes had to wear a surplice seemingly no longer than a lady's apron; not to mention modern drapery of a severely simple form, in which it is designedly impossible to get at one's handkerchief, or at a coin for the offertory. My friend D——, a particularly short man, although he does not realise the fact, put on the surplice of a tall incumbent. Holding it bunched up in each hand, he walked sedately down the middle aisle, behind the silver-stick in waiting—the observed of all observers. I watched his perilous ascent of the chancel steps with anxiety. There was a fumbling and stumbling; and, presently, swathed and helpless, he rolled back like Lord Rolle at the Queen's coronation.

D——'s face and figure were surely intended for comedy. Methinks I see him now, walking down High Street in his morning costume: a dress coat with long tails, huge upturned collar with tie nine inches by three, large worsted gloves, a tall hat stuck at the back of his head, and a bulky gingham under his arm; the veritable image of Paul Pry, and "I hope I don't intrude."

All innocent of harm, he dreamt not of the waggery of artful boys as he wended his way, a stranger, towards the church where he was to officiate. He was cautious withal; and when he had walked more than the expected distance, waited at four cross-roads until re-assured by an intelligent youngster, whom he rewarded with threepence, that to keep straight on, "summut over a moile," would bring him to R——. "Is *that* the church?" said my friend, pointing to a tower on the next hill. "That's him right enough," was the reply.

The bells were chiming as D——, almost melted with the heat, took his seat in the vestry, and waited to be robed. Presently, rather a dignified gentleman entered. "Clerk, will you please to fasten these bands," exclaimed D.

"Really, sir," said the gentleman, smiling, "I have not the pleasure of ——"

"Oh! I am come to take duty for Mr. S——."

"Why, Mr. S—— is the Rector of R——."

"Yes; and is not this R—— church?"

"No, my good sir; this is N——. R—— church is three miles in another direction."

Poor D——! how he blessed that intelligent youngster as he rushed over hedge and ditch to keep his appointment. He could hear the two refractory bells, clamorous for his presence, shouting "Be quick, be quick!" as he scrambled over the last stile, half an hour late. The people were leaving: he waved them back with his umbrella; he could not speak. At last he managed to gasp, "I will explain after service."

Very trying is it to a neat man to find a soiled or dilapidated surplice. At a secluded church in Leicestershire, I well remember a heavy garment, with many folds, having a huge collar like a bed-gown: and so often mended as to be a "thing of shreds and patches."

As it hung across the communion rails in front of a stove to dry, steaming from six days' dampness, I discovered that it was buttonless. But the clerk was equal to the emergency. Seeing, as I adjusted the elegant robe in the midst of a dozen school-children, actively engaged in crunching lollipops, that there would be a wide parting in front, he stealthily moved to a high pew, where sat the churchwarden's wife. The lady's head disappeared; there was a too-audible whisper. My friend returned beaming, and secured the erratic collar with a hair-pin!

Mistakes often arise from the common practice of trusting alone to figures in writing down the hymns. The caligraphy of the clergy is none of the clearest; and the remark by dear old Sydney Smith (a sorry *speller*, by the way) of a correspondent, that his letters resembled the gyrations of a bluebottle fly after taking a header in the inkstand, applies to many of my acquaintance. When, however, the clergyman's wife, who usually presides at the instrument, issues these paper slips, they are apt to puzzle the most wary. A lady's figures, such as the 3 and 5, the 7 and 9, are generally so similar as to get "completely mixed," like the Siamese twins: erasures and re-insertions are frequent; and the numbers are sometimes written down when the hymn-book is closed and out of sight. Therefore we are not surprised when the minister gives out one hymn and the choir sings another; or when the announcement is followed by an awkward pause.

I have known instances where the singing after the third collect depended upon eventuality. In a church in Kent, after service had commenced, the following hurriedly-written notice was passed to me: "If James Standen and Ellen Shorter come, there will be a hanthem; if not, him no go."

I must admit that I felt rather anxious, when late-comers caused the venerable door to groan in rebuke, whether the missing vocalists would steer towards the choir-seats; but there was no arrival there, and therefore I passed on to the other prayers. Yet I had some misgiving upon hearing the rustle of garments, and seeing at a glance that the congregation were reaching their hymn-books; whilst the lady at the harmonium had her fingers on the keys.

"Did you expect a hymn?" said I, afterwards.

"Yes," said she, smiling. "Surely John Carey wrote it down and passed it to the reading-desk."

In vindication, I handed the paper to her.

"Here it is," she exclaimed, triumphantly. I examined the notice more closely, and found that the words which I had taken in connection with the context to mean, "if not, him no go," were to be rendered, "if not—Hymn No. 90." These and other mistakes would be avoided by adopting the simple plan which I have found useful in the parishes where I have been incumbent: namely, that of writing the first line after the number of the hymn.

There is a kind of nightmare, peculiar, I believe, to the clergy:

that of keeping a congregation waiting by being unable to find one's place. How many dreams, as Hood reminds us, "are something more than fictions." Tennyson justly calls them the "refraction of events."

This dream, or fantasy, became too real to me on one occasion. The new table of lessons had just been introduced, and the churchwardens of C——, willing to move with the times, had moved every book from the broad ledge of the reading-desk (there was no lectern) and placed on it a brand new tome of meagre dimensions, supposed to contain the prayer-book and altered lectionary. The intricacies of Bradshaw were nothing to it. It was more misleading than the famous clock, which the owner alone remembered that when the hands pointed to seven and it struck two, the correct time was exactly twenty minutes to twelve. I had not a moment for inspection; for, being Good Friday, there was no singing; even the Gloria was read. When the time came for reading the lessons I saw little besides a kaleidoscopic jumble of paragraphs, with an occasional heading halfway down a page. No sequence—no intelligibility. I was too far above my flock to borrow a Bible. There was a solemn silence as I turned the leaves rapidly, and at length was obliged to fix upon chapters strangely out of harmony with the day.

This incident reminds me of another, when my old acquaintance, the Rector of E——, not easily disconcerted, was somewhat taken aback. He was deputed to read the first lesson at a Harvest Festival. The day was bright; the congregation large; the decorations equally cheerful. Mr. —— stept with stately mien (he was brother to a bishop) to the lectern. Alas! the special lesson was not found; and his memory failed. That it was in Deuteronomy, he knew; and he hoped, by a rapid survey of the chapters, to identify the verses. It was all in vain. In his flurry he selected the end of the 27th chapter instead of the beginning of the 28th; and was afterwards plaintively reminded that he had reversed the history of Balaam inasmuch as he had been brought to bless the people and he had cursed them altogether.

On ordinary, as well as on special occasions, it is well to have the lessons found and marked beforehand. One cannot always call to mind chronological sequence; and it is very easy, when in haste or nervous, to pass over one of the minor prophets, or short epistles, without being able publicly to explain, as my primitive predecessor did at S——, when the leaves stuck together in the Psalms. Leaning over to the clerk, he exclaimed, in a voice tremulous with emotion: "Clifford, Clifford! why have you not aired this book?"

Beware of venerable or dilapidated service books. The clergyman in Jersey who prayed for George IV. a week after that monarch was dead, was not more oblivious of history than my acquaintance T——, when he remembered "our gracious Queen Charlotte" in the Litany; and, at the communion table, floundering amid a catalogue, half erased, of deceased majesties, managed to revivify George II.

Poor T——, like Patrick O'Sheene, was born to blunder. From an inability to sound the letter G he would startle a congregation by the exclamation, "Let us *sin* to the praise, &c.;" and so little could he depend upon his memory that when first he published banns he could get no further than "If any of you know cause or just impediment;" adding, after a lengthened pause, "let him now speak, or else hereafter for ever hold his peace." His notices were of a discursive kind. Saints' days and societies got inextricably mixed. Prayers would be announced for eight o'clock in the evening, and a Church Missionary Meeting for half-past nine in the morning. It was said that at the bishop's examination his answers to questions on the authenticity of the Gospels was a dissertation to prove that St. Paul was not the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

How caustic were those lines; the impromptu of a far-seeing mamma on another clerical failing:

"My daughters praise our curate's eyes,
But *I* can't say if they're divine,
For when he prays he closes them,
And when he preaches I close mine."

I am thankful that the old three-decker arrangement—clerk's desk, reading-desk, and pulpit—has generally been discarded; and clergymen can stand at ease when reading or preaching. What could be more trying to a nervous deacon on his first appearance than to be placed in a box "six feet above contradiction," the centre of a thousand eyes? How well I remember the feeling of being in the car of a balloon; and, glancing timorously at the expectant crowd below; whilst the gaseliers (turned down during the sermon) would cause such a rush and roar up the branches placed each side the ponderous cushion that the lights quavered several inches above the burners. No wonder that even the majestic Siddons spoke of the voice that would not come, and the tremor that would not go. The awful thrill, too, when one's sleeve catches the manuscript, and it is all but over the narrow ledge. "Over the brink of it; picture it, think of it!"

I also remember another singular arrangement. Half-a-dozen steps led to the reading-desk. These were pushed in after entering; and the deep door closed by the beadle, who then retired to the extreme end of the church. There was no escape without help. A stranger once leaving without ceremony, opened the door, and stept into—vacancy. My kind incumbent (given to reverie) was penned in one evening and forgotten. He told me also of a "strange preacher," whose sermon answered to the definition of a line—length without breadth. An hour of somnolent syllabication passed; the congregation became fidgety; the incumbent perplexed. An hour and a half; and there was the sound of hurrying feet towards the West doors. Two hours! "Will the man *never* cease?" thought my friend, as he

looked at the last of the hearers in the parsonage pew. There was a whispered consultation among the custodians of St. Peter's. Should the organ strike up; or the gas be turned off; or a hymn be given out? At length, the beadle ascended the pulpit stairs, and pulling the orator by the gown exclaimed, "They are all gone out, sir!"

The Puritan preacher who would turn his hour-glass up again with the observation, "Now, my friends, we will have another glass together!" would scarcely have ventured upon a discourse lasting two hours and a half; and we stand aghast at Dr. Barrow's three-and-a-half-hours' sermon, and the late Archbishop's first charge when Bishop of London, lasting five hours.

Said my old friend, Professor D——, "Never be licensed to a church where there are galleries." In the classics he was at the front; in English composition nowhere. Finding that his manuscript sermons were at a discount, he tried extempore preaching on the plea: if you are persecuted in one text, flee unto another. His failure reminds me how an acquaintance was brought to grief over an unfortunate simile. He was speaking of the wilderness of Judea. "I dare say you understand, my brethren, what a wilderness is like. You all know Mow Cop," continued he, rather at a loss for modern instances. "Well, *that* is a wilderness." Now it happened that Mow Cop, a rugged hill some miles distant, formed a compact parish of some thousands of souls under the supervision of an energetic vicar; and great was his wrath upon hearing that his populous parish had been compared to a wilderness.

Professor D——, failing in originality, determined "to steal away the brains" of another. How he chuckled over the lament of the Somersetshire Rector:

> "They broke into my dwelling: stole my silver and my store;
> But they could not steal my sermons, for they were stole before.'

My friend's sermons were now appreciated. Success began to animate him. Ah! he had forgotten the galleries from whence the discovery was made that he preached from print.

Not so a former vicar of Dronfield, who could deliver without observation the sentiments of the late Dr. Blair; until an old lady, one of his flock, chanced to read the identical sermon in the evening which she had heard in the morning. Ever afterwards she kept the volumes locked up in a box in the family pew. He mentioned that, on a later occasion, being pressed for time, he drew upon his favourite author. No sooner had he given out the text than the lady produced her copy of Blair. "But I just put the old woman off the scent," said he, "for I began three pages further on, and she never overtook me all the way through."

There is no duty more pleasing to the minister than that of joining hearts and hands together. I am not like the clerical bird of ill-omen who would afterwards refuse the customary fee with the remark, "Na, na, go your ways; I have done ye enough mischief for ane day."

When I was senior curate in a populous town, and had sometimes to publish between thirty and forty banns at a time, one difficulty was to remember the times of asking; another, to decipher the proper names set in a network of flourishes by the assiduous clerk. On one occasion only were the banns forbidden; but my readers will be pleased to hear that, notwithstanding this jolt, the course of true love *did* run smooth.

Those who are accustomed to the silent and decorous weddings of country churches would hardly realise the motley appearance and the strange disorder which prevailed some years ago in our mother churches; when twelve or fifteen couples were waiting the inevitable forget-me-*k*not. Like the connubial crowd in Manchester Cathedral, who were bidden to be married first and afterwards to sort themselves, I seemed to be dealing out matrimony in the same wholesale manner. The task would have been easy had the parties remained precisely as they were stationed at the rails; but the gentlemen most interested in the ceremony would fall out of the ranks to whisper soft sawder to their supporters; whilst the ladies would retrogade to struggle out of gloves far too small, or to correct sudden familiarities from cousins not too far removed. Alas! there were no blue-ribbon men in those days, or all the blue ribbons were over the border: and as the betrothed were bound to have a "sup" before going "t' parson," the service was sadly marred by interpolations such as "Wilt thou have this woman (you must not laugh) to be thy wedded wife (loose her hands), to live together (don't keep saying, I will)?—Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour and keep her (please attend) in sickness and in health (turn this way), and forsaking all other (I shall wait until you are quiet) ——."

There was a perplexing pause on one occasion, because the bridegroom was chasing the bridesmaids down the aisles, and would not be brought to book. Another time the ring was missing, and the lady would not, for luck, be married with any but a brand new article.

Another kind of diffidence struck me when I was a surrogate in a well-known inland spa. A stranger called upon me; and, after considerable hesitation and harking back, declared that a friend of his wished for a marriage licence.

"Is he near at hand?"

"Yes! but too much engaged to come."

"I am sorry; but you must try and persuade him."

"He is very unwell; in fact not able to leave his bed."

"And the lady?"

"Oh! she is in town."

"Very unfortunate," said I, "but one of the parties must make the application."

"Can't I have the licence?" exclaimed the gentleman in dismay.

"Not until you bring your friend."

He left the room, evidently perplexed. In a few minutes another ring at the bell. Same gentleman enters, looking down, and rubbing the silk of a new hat. "I am the friend!"

When making the entries in the parish registers, I never let the formula "of full age" suffice; and my enquiries under this head cause, I fear, many a slight subterfuge. Ah, those tell-tale registers! A careful search and comparison (Croker-like) will sometimes show that a bride was baptised six or seven years before she was born. (By the way — the lady of fifty-three who was lamenting to her husband the advent of her fortieth birthday, and was consoled by the rejoinder: "Never mind, my dear, you will get further from that frightful epoch every day," had better keep away from the Birmingham Free Library, where the name, age, and profession are tabulated every time one asks for a book.) Neither does it do to let the flurry and quaver of the bridal party cause their signatures to be locked up in hieroglyphic. I bend over, and direct that each name shall be full, clear, and legible; "written for those that come after;" taking care that even "Bill Stumps, his mark" shall have equal branches; and not sprawl over the page like a magnified daddy-long-legs. Looking the other day at an entry made in 1845, I found a geranium leaf pressed between the leaves. Probably it had formed part of the bridal bouquet of my parishioner; once the pretty Miss S——; but fit emblem now of the bouquet of life; blossom, verdure, fragrance, all gone: nothing but a withered stalk sitting in weeds in yonder pew, waiting for the end.

Speaking of the "Offices," care should be taken that the parties chiefly concerned are present; for I am not the first who has been led astray in this respect. How often has a clerk whispered: "Mrs. —— wants to have her baby christened, and to be churched; but they have not come yet." As the service proceeded, how anxiously I have waited the expected arrival; how relieved to hear the shrill treble from an atom of humanity.

Reasoning, like the sage Butler, from probability I have sometimes walked down the church after the second lesson to the far-off font, only to find that "I could not see my little friend because he was not there," and retraced my steps, demurely conscious of the inference from neighbouring eyes, that "someone had blundered." And even when the christening party duly waits at the font, how needful it is to be quite sure of the sex, and the name of the infant.

My dear friend H—— forgetting to ask, and assuming, I suppose, from its lusty cries that the child was a boy, proceeded with the service as written, when he was somewhat discomfited by a buxom lass with: "Please sir, he's a she!"

Larwood relates that a clergyman once reading the burial service, without knowing the sex of the departed, paused at the grave, and whispered to one of the bereaved, "Brother or Sister?" The man very innocently replied, "No relation at all, sir; only an acquaintance."

Once at M——, on the other hand, I was fearful that I had attributed the wrong sex to a child announced in an undertone to be a boy. To the demand, "Name this child!" came the half-audible response, "Carline!" Remembering how rustics clip their words, I again put the query. "Carline!" came back, in the shrill tone of a Mrs. Cluppins in the witness-box. "Caroline!" I whispered, "you said the child was a boy." "Oh, yes!" said the nurse, nodding approvingly and dinking the baby—"Carline!"

Calling to mind a case at Strensham, where a young lady was ordered to be named Francis; and another mentioned by Lord Albemarle of William Anne, I continued the service, giving the name as pronounced, and gliding delicately over the pronoun "*he*." When in the vestry I was relieved to find that the name really was Carline, a common family name in that hilly district.

At such times we may always tell whether the minister is a family man by the way he handles the baby. Paterfamilias receives the little one with graceful ease. Babbicombe rests on the raised left arm; peaceful and passive as a water lily. There is no disarrangement of the infantine drapery; in a word, no gaucherie. But, mark the lone bachelor taking up his duplicate in swaddling clothes. First the entanglement of nurse's shawl with the surplice; the inclination to elevate the tiny feet some two feet higher than baby's head; then the frantic struggle and squall, as if the newly-opened eyes realised the close embrace of a finny monster of the deep.

If it behoves the clergyman carefully to ascertain the arrival of the christening party, additional caution is necessary when there is notice of a churching. A ludicrous *contretemps* happened to me in a former parish, where such notice was usually given the previous day, and the ladies often came into church late. Fortunately there was no occasion to scan rows of distant seats, and endeavour to single out the grateful object of solicitude, for the good old times had provided a spacious enclosure conveniently placed near the door, and having in buff letters "writ large" on a black ground—"Churching Pew;" so there could be no mistake.

And yet a mistake was made. For one afternoon in July, having received due notice of a 'churching,' the above official seat remained empty until the end of the second lesson. What possessed Miss B——, unless she had a bee in her bonnet, to test her walking powers that sultry afternoon by rising from an early dinner, and walking to a strange church? If Johnson declared to Mrs. Thrale, afterwards the octogenarian, that "life declines at thirty-five," what must a walk of two miles be over Derbyshire hill and dale to a town-bred spinster, and stout, twice that age?

The result was to be expected. The bell went down as Miss B—— went up the last hill but one. At length she reached the porch a quarter of an hour late. "Never mind," thought the lady, "I will pass in noiselessly and take the first seat." The door had

been turned back for the proper occupant, therefore Miss B. did not see the title on the panel; and feeling very hot and tired she remained seated during the whole service. Perceiving the ample outline of a lady, and not then knowing who Miss B. was, I concluded that her mission was to return thanks, and read the appointed service, when all the congregation stood during the psalm; and many looked curiously at the elderly lady complacently seated in the state pew. The reader may imagine my consternation, afterwards, when I learned that the woman who was to have been present, stayed away because it was unpleasantly warm; and that I had scandalised a bevy of marriageable young ladies of good position by churching their venerable maiden aunt!

ONE LIFE.

HER white little hand is resting
On the arm that held it of old,
And he thinks it is only the night-breeze
That makes it so soft and cold.

Her eyes into his are gazing—
Eyes ever so faithful to him,
And he thinks it the shadowy twilight
That makes them so strange and dim.

Her pretty face turns towards him;
Ah, when did her face turn away?
And he thinks it the silvery moonlight
That makes it so faint and grey.

O spirit that lingers and falters,
Take courage and whisper "Good bye."
A life?—why a life is nothing,
When millions each minute die.

With millions each minute dying,
What matters one life or death?
One fragile and tender existence?
One tremulous passing breath?

A life? Why a life is nothing!
What matters tho' one burn dim?
Alas for the folly of reason—
One life is the world to him!

E. A. H.

"TILL DEATH US DO PART."

"TILL death us do part," rang out the low, clear voice of the officiating minister throughout the quiet church. And "Till death us do part" spoke the man who knelt before him; and "Till death us do part" in her turn repeated the woman.

Thus they plighted their troth in the face of the world and before Heaven, that man and woman, Humphrey Carbonel and Emma Crane. They had promised to love and cherish and honour each other, and he to comfort her and she to obey him in sickness and in health, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, *until death did them part.*

May breezes stole softly in through the open porch; May violets filled the air with perfume; May birds were singing; May dews yet sparkled on the jewelled grass. It was a true bridal morning; and, amid the almost Sabbath stillness and the spring-tide loveliness, the vows were exchanged that made them one.

Until death! The lover-husband glanced down upon the timid girl whose hand lay in his, feeling suddenly how terrible was that word—*death!* Why should the thought have come to him? He clasped the trembling hand closer, as if he felt already the chilling of those warm pulses. Even in the midst of the solemn service, his imagination travelled forward to a day when those solemn promises would have been fulfilled, and death had ended all—*her* death. It did not occur to Captain Carbonel to think that it might be his own.

The young girl, happy and smiling in her bridal robes, never once thought of death at all. How should she? And how—still less, *how*—could either of them call up a picture of something worse than death to break the marriage vow?

A young couple they, supremely happy on that May morning. Sunshine, and glistening dew, and opening flowers, and the joyous song of birds—*they* do not put forth notions of winter-chill and gloom. No, nor portend it.

"*What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder!*"

The tremulous voice of the clergyman, for he was agitated, pronounced those words very solemnly. The smile upon the bridegroom's lip echoed but that of his heart. *Who* should have power to put asunder two who loved so well? And Emma? She thought only of the strong, manly form by her side. It was the old, old story of the oak and the vine. The present happiness was perfect, and the future would be like unto it; nay, much more abundant.

So reason we in our blindness, in the inexperienced youth of our early morning, when the glamour of hope is upon us, and all looks radiant. Later, standing before the calm-faced teacher, whose name

is Life, we learn that no earthly existence is perfect; that the sunniest life hath shadows, and that the sweet spring-time, the brightest summer, must give place to faded flowers, to dying leaves.

"You cannot have Emma unless you retire altogether from the army, or get put upon half-pay," had said Emma Crane's stern old guardian to Captain Carbonel; for she had neither father nor mother, brother nor sister. And Humphrey Carbonel, tired perhaps of a soldier's idle life, for all the world seemed to have been at peace for ages and likely to remain so, got put upon half-pay.

Sure never did a couple begin life under more promising auspices! They had a pretty homestead of their own—it was Emma's, not his—amid a small colony of other pretty homesteads, and they had between them a handsome competency, and there was pleasant society around; and life was as delightful as a morning dream.

A child was born to them, but it died. That brought sorrow. No other child came, and time went on. And here some lines that I met with in a periodical in youthful days occur to me. I don't know whose they are. If I knew then I have forgotten.

"Alas, that early love should fly,
That friendship's self should fade and die;
And glad hearts pine with cankering fears,
And starry eyes grow dim with tears!
For years are sad and withering things,
And sorrow lingers, and joy has wings;
And falsehood steals into sunny bowers,
And time's dull footstep treads on flowers.
And the waters of life flow deep and fast,
And they bear to the sorrowful grave at last."

Why should the lines be put in here? Because they just express the altered condition of things that fell upon Humphrey and Emma Carbonel. They grew estranged from one another, hardly knowing how, or why. He said she no longer cared to please him, her husband; she said he liked other wives better than her—that he gave them all his attention, and gave her none. And again time went on.

Seven times had the May violets opened their blue eyes in the mossy dells since that lovely day when he and she had vowed to love and cherish each other until death did them part; seven times the May dew-drops had made the green meadows all aglow with sparkles; and seven times the sweet spring flowers had faded beneath the scorching heat of summer. Ah, if violets had been the only things that had died out in those seven years!

It was May again now. But it brought no cherished bridal flowers to Humphrey Carbonel and his wife, no clasping of hands, no fulfilment of love's glorious prophecy. Estrangement had but deepened, and they were parting in pride and anger. Tired with the state of affairs at home—the unbending coldness, the resentful tones, the cruel bickerings in which both indulged—Captain Carbonel

had got placed on full service again. He was going out to be shot at, if fate so willed; for we were at war now.

The day of departure dawned, and they parted with bitter words. Heaven and their own hearts knew how much or how little they suffered: there was no outward sign of it. People, who had ceased to wonder at the suspected estrangement between Captain and Mrs. Carbonel, said to one another that it was brave of him to go out voluntarily to the wars. "Marlbrouck s'en-va-t-en-guerre!" So he went off with an indifferent countenance and a jaunty air; and she stayed behind equally jaunty, equally indifferent.

One year passed on. Emma Carbonel began to feel lonely, to sicken of her unsatisfactory life. Bit by bit she had grown to see that she and Humphrey had been but foolish, both of them, the one as much so as the other. Did he feel the same? It might be. Yet their letters continued to be of the scantiest and coldest.

Another year dragged itself on, and then she made no pretence of keeping up the farce of resentment to her own heart. Time, generally speaking, shows up our past mistakes in their true colours. Emma Carbonel longed for her husband to come home, she grew feverishly impatient to be reconciled. Mariana in the Moated Grange was a favourite reading of hers just now—

> "She said, 'I am a weary, weary,
> He cometh not,' she said:
> "'He cometh not, and all is dreary—
> I would that I were dead!'"

Humphrey Carbonel came not. Nothing came but the details of the fighting; wars, and rumours of wars.

May was in again; another May. Mrs. Carbonel sat at her window in the twilight of a chilly, drizzling day. The gloom without harmonised with the gloom within. And yet, hardly so. The rain might be cold, dreary, dispiriting, but it was nothing as compared with the desolation of her heart. Childless, and worse than widowed! She had hoped, ah! for a year or two now, that Humphrey's old love for her might overrule his pride and bitterness, and prompt him to write to her a word of tender regret for their conduct to one another. But he did not. She was feeling it all to her heart's core this miserable evening; unavailing remorse lay heavily upon her; she wished she could die and end it. No sign of reconciliation had passed since they parted in pride and anger; not a word of repentance on either side had crossed the dreary gulf that flowed between them. Words of another poet, dead and gone, floated through her mind as she sat. Night and day lately they had seemed to haunt it.

> "Alas! they had been friends in youth—
> But whispering tongues can poison truth.

And constancy lives in realms above,
And life is thorny, and youth is vain :
And to be wrath with one we love,
Doth work like madness in the brain."

Should she go mad? There came moments when she feared she should if this state of things continued. A week ago there had been some talk in the papers that the war would, in all probability, soon be over. Then Humphrey would come home again.

Her thoughts turned to this phase; she began to dwell upon it, and what it would involve to him and to her. Presently she lost herself in fond anticipations, realising it all as in a picture. Somehow she felt a strange nearness to him, as if he were coming then, were almost there. She heard the rain beating against the windows, and she glanced to see that the fire in the grate was bright, with a singular sense that it ought to be bright when he came in. She gazed beyond the house gates down the road in the gathering gloom, almost, *almost* expecting to see him approach, as she used to see him in the days gone by. She had been wretchedly lonely so long now: and she wanted to hear his footstep in the hall, to feel his caressing hand on her sunny hair, and to hear his bright words, "Good evening, Emma, my dear!" It did not seem strange to her that this should happen, or that she was expecting it, though she had never once had this feeling through all these separated years. It did not seem marvellous that he should come thus from beyond seas without notice. Had he opened the door and stood there by her side she would not have felt startled or surprised, or at all wondered at it. The bewilderment wrought by long-continued sorrow had stolen over her senses.

But Humphrey did not come. Only, instead, the postman came in at the gate, and knocked at the door. Mechanically she wondered why he was so late this evening. She heard the servant who answered the knock say the same to the man.

"Yes, it's late," he answered. "A mail from the war is in, you see; and it brought a good many letters."

The woman came in with a thick letter and the lights. Her mistress took it with nervous haste. A *thick* letter, and from her husband! until now his letters had been of the thinnest and slightest. The writing—*was* it Humphrey's? Why, yes, it was his; but what could make it look so shaky? She opened it carefully, and some enclosures fell out. A fond letter or two of hers written to him after their marriage, during a temporary separation; a curl of her sunny hair; a plain gold ring which he had worn ever since his wedding-day; and a little folded note with a few trembling lines in it.

"I am dying, Emma. Fell to-day in battle. God forgive us our folly, my precious wife! I believe we loved one another all the while. There is another Life, my dear one. I shall be waiting for you there.—Humphrey."

Emma Carbonel did not cry, did not faint. She lay back in a

low, large chair, her meek hands clasped in supplication, praying to be pardoned for all her hard wickedness to her dead husband, feebly beseeching God, in His mercy, to take her to that better life.

The next day the papers published a list of the fallen. Fifteen soldiers and two officers, one of the latter being Captain Humphrey Carbonel.

So it was all over. Death had parted them. They had taken their marriage vows to love and to cherish one another until death did them part—and lo! now it had stepped in to do its work.

Ah! but something else had stepped in previously: angry passions indulged in, malice not suppressed. But for that, Humphrey Carbonel had never gone out to the fatal plain where death was indiscriminately putting in his sickle. Emma Carbonel would have given now her own life to recal the past.

Experience must be bought; sometimes all too dearly. She saw how worse than foolish it is, taking it at the best, to render our short existence here one of marring anger. Evil temper bears us up at the moment, but time must bring the reaction, and the repentance. A little forbearance on both sides, especially on hers, a few soothing words, instead of spiteful retorts, and this bitter retribution had not been hers; or his, in dying. "A soft answer turneth away wrath." If they had but obeyed the words of holy writ!

And now what was left to them? Death had claimed him, and all was over. To her, a life-long time of anguished remorse, a vain longing to undo what could never be undone in this world. Could not some of us, hot and hasty in our dealings, learn a lesson from it?

But something better was in store for Emma Carbonel. Humphrey did not die. Within a week the news came to her that the injuries, which had induced a death-like swoon mistaken at the time for death, had not yet been fatal. He was removed to the hospital, was being treated there by skilful surgeons, and the issue was as yet uncertain.

The issue was not for death, but life. Some months later he came home, a maimed soldier, bearing about him marks which time would never efface.

Just at the dusk of evening, as she had pictured it in her fond dream, he came. When the fly drove up to the door with him, she was surprised, for he was not expected until the next day. He came in, slowly limping. The bustle over, the servants shaken hands with, he lay back, fatigued, in the easy chair, Emma kneeling before him, clinging to him in passionate emotion, tears streaming from her eyes, whispering to him in deprecating terms to forgive her.

"Upon condition that you forgive me, Emma," he answered, agitated as herself. "It has been a sharp experience for us both. My darling wife, I do not think we shall ever quarrel with one another again."

"Never again; never a single mis-word again, Humphrey, so long as life shall last."

E. L. L.

THE CRUISE OF THE RESERVE SQUADRON.

By Charles W. Wood,
Author of "Through Holland," "In the Black Forest," etc.

THE Bull-ring of Granada is capable of holding many thousand spectators. Like all others of its kind in Spain, it is open to the sky. As a place of public entertainment it has its seats of "high and low degree." The performance generally takes place about five o'clock, when the declining sun gives the building a shady and a sunny side. The former commands a higher price than the latter, so that an early visitor not in the secret, will mildly wonder to find the sunny side packed and blazing, the shady seats still half empty. Before the play begins, however, there is scarcely standing room on the right hand or on the left, and late comers are often turned away. The bull-fight is the most popular and renowned amusement in Spain: and the more cruel the sport, the greater the pleasure, excitement, and gratification of the spectators.

Our courier, after his twenty minutes' struggle, secured the best places at command. They were excellent for seeing, in the shade, sufficiently elevated, and not too far from the arena: plain stone seats, tier above tier, uncushioned, and running round the whole building, mere divisions here and there marking degrees in price. Behind us, sloping upwards, was what might be called the dress-circle. Still higher were the boxes, reserved for the authorities and élite of the town. Most of these subscribe by the year, just as one may subscribe in London for a box at the opera.

The Spanish bull-fight is a sort of drama in three acts, and the performers are divided into four classes. The *espadas* come last of all, and kill the bull with the sword. Most expert, they are paid at the highest rate, and receive the greatest applause. As a rule, they are wiry, quick, somewhat small men, and their frequent good looks enlist people's sympathies in their favour. There are the *banderilleros*, whose part is to stick small weapons—something like a rocket-stick with a large, thin fish-hook fastened to it—into the back of the animal. The bull, gradually infuriated by pain, sometimes rushes madly about, sometimes stands at bay, not knowing what to make of it all.

At the commencement the bull is suddenly launched from its dark cell into the broad glare of the arena, where it is greeted with the shouts of the multitude. Dazzled and bewildered, it plunges for the centre, and stands there, almost as if suddenly stupefied by some narcotic; nor moves until the *chulos* or *capas* attract its attention by holding up the proverbial "red rag" to its terrified vision.

The capas are picked men, provided with long red cloths or

banners, to attract the bull's attention at critical moments, and work it up to a pitch of frenzy. Especially needed are they when the picador is in danger, and the bull, having, as it were, driven him into a corner, makes a dead set at him or his horse. Then up comes the capa, and flourishing his red banner, turns the animal to a fresh point of attack and releases the picador. These capas have to be men of agility, and many a time nothing else saves them from certain death. Over and over again if their foot slipped they would never have the chance of attending another bull-fight. The heart stops and the blood freezes as you think the bull has the capa at last, and no earthly power can release him. And he

A Small Bull Fight; not the Bull Ring of Granada.

frequently escapes only by jumping over the partition that separates the arena from the spectators.

The *picadores* carry the lance and are mounted. Their business is to ride at the bull, and defend themselves and their horses from its attack, contriving the while to prick the animal just sufficiently to draw blood and cause enough pain to commence infuriation.

The chief bull-fights of Spain—those of Seville and Madrid—are organised with an elaboration not to be seen in any other town. The best men are to be found there, and they seldom fight elsewhere. The play commences with a procession of the whole band of performers, who, in their gay dresses—picadores on horseback and chulos carrying their red banners wound round the arm—enter the arena and cross it solemnly to the Mayor's box. That dignitary then throws down a key that is supposed to release the bull from confinement. The espada as solemnly picks it up, an act considered equivalent to an assertion that he will do his duty either by killing the bull or

losing his own life in the combat. The procession then retires, the trumpets sound, and the bull rushes in.

We took our seats amidst a vast concourse of men and women given over to excitement and expectation. The women looked, if possible, more anxious than the men, for the enjoyment of the coming sport. An expression of cruelty seemed to dominate most of the faces. This might have been fancy; but whether it was so or not, only a nature hardened to cruelty could possibly, time after time, take pleasure in this national pastime.

BULL FIGHTERS.

To-day there was no procession. The hour struck from the town clocks, and the sound came in through the open space above. As with one consent, the multitude directed their gaze towards the entrance to the arena. The trumpets blew a shrill martial air. Enter the bull—a somewhat small animal, black as jet, hero and victim of the moment.

Out of darkness into this blazing sunlight and heat. The animal rushed to the centre of the ring and stood still, looking stupid and terror-stricken. Then entered the capas, with their long red cloaks or banners, followed by three picadores, mounted on the most wretched hacks ever seen : living skeletons of horses, only fit to be put to death, though not in this merciless kind of way. The wretched animals seemed hardly able to bear the weight of their

riders—a weight, indeed, sufficient to test the powers of a horse in good condition.

One of the capas advanced and flourished his banner. The bull gazed for a bewildered instant, then head down, plunged full tilt at the point of attack. The capa sprang from side to side, performing wonderful feats of agility. This portion of the spectacle was interesting and exciting. The dextrous manner in which the capas avoid the bull; the graceful wave and flourish of the banners; their gay and picturesque dresses, showing off to perfection the active, well-made forms: these are the few redeeming, not excusing, points in the drama: a drama which sometimes ends in a terrible tragedy. Each time that the capa escaped from what seemed a moment of extreme peril, the crowd clapped and cheered lustily, and the bull, between the noise and the dazzling red, seemed to grow paralysed with terror, and took that hunted look so painful to see in any animal.

A picador advanced, watched his opportunity, pricked the bull with his lance, and backed. The bull, roused by the pain, dashed at the horse. Up came a capa with his red banner, and, diverting the attention of the bull, for a moment saved the horse. All was now excitement. The play had really begun. The eyes of the spectators flashed with pleasure; mouths opened with eagerness; the rustle of a surging tide ran through the assembly. Again the women looked more cruelly full of enjoyment than the men. The capas were all in the combat, waving their banners from all parts, springing from side to side, jumping the barrier when hard pushed, maddening the bull. As I have said, this part of the entertainment, as far as the capas were concerned, was graceful and interesting.

Again a picador advanced, pricked the back of the animal, that with one bound plunged its horns into the horse. It is hardly too much to say that it made one's blood curdle: and from this point, the play became a scene of horror.

A portion of what followed is not to be described. The horse fell, rolling over its rider. The latter would be crushed over and over again, but he is so protected by padding and invisible armour that he does not easily come to harm. Weighted and encumbered by these necessary shields, he has to be raised by the capas. The horse, maimed, mutilated, dying, is again goaded on to its feet, and the play re-commences. The more horrible it grows, the greater the enjoyment of the spectators.

At one moment three horses lay dead in the ring, and this ended the first act of the drama. The trumpets sounded, the picadores retired for the present, amidst a volley of cheers that were wild and deafening.

Then commenced the second part. The capas, more needed than ever, remained in the arena. In came the banderilleros, with their barbs or hooks. There were no horses, but the risk to the men was

greater than at first. Their part was to stick these short barbs into the back of the bull, a feat requiring great activity and presence of mind. Over and over again it seemed that nothing could save them from certain death: and sometimes nothing did save them except a jump over the barrier, or a capa advancing with his banner and directing the fury of the animal towards himself.

The scene was no doubt exciting, but it was also full of pain. The bull often seemed in the very act of plunging his horns into his enemy, who, nevertheless, escaped as by a miracle. Capas and banderilleros were all life and quicksilver. The bull in a short time was rushing about with five or six barbs in his back, streaked with red, hunted, maddened, unable to escape. In some bull-fights crackers are attached to the sticks, which explode as soon as the hook is fixed into the animal.

The barbs disposed of, the trumpets again sounded; Act the Second was over.

Act the Third. The bull had now to be killed—or to kill his opponent, for this sometimes happens. In came the espada, with his sword, carrying a short red cloak. He was dressed in black velvet, fitting tightly to the body, was small and active, and looked courageous and determined. The people received him with loud applause.

This is the most critical part of the performance. Single-handed, the espada has to attack the bull, parry its plunges, and end the play. It requires the greatest activity, nerve, and presence of mind; whilst to plunge the sword into the animal down to the very hilt, needs dexterity and strength of wrist.

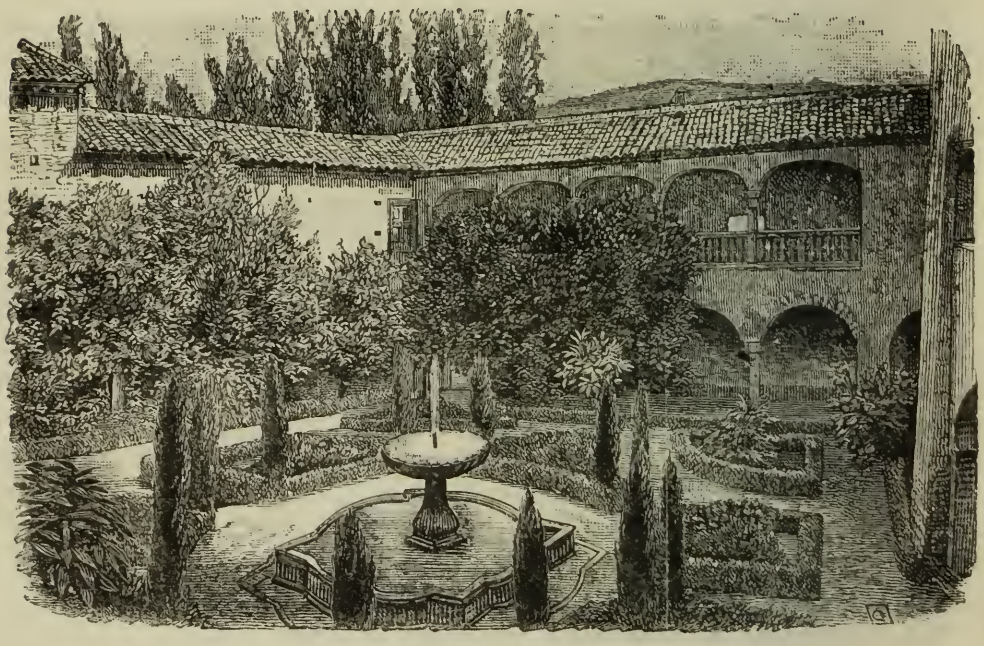
The bull, after a few moments' rest and respite, was standing, exhausted with rage, pain and loss of blood, but still a formidable enemy. The espada, throwing his cloak over his sword to conceal it, advanced cautiously and waved it to and fro. As if tired of the play and unwilling to begin again, the animal took no notice beyond slightly raising its head and blinking its eyes. Then once more seized with fury, it suddenly plunged at the espada, who sprang aside and let the animal rush past.

This sort of thing went on for five minutes or more. The fate of the espada seemed often to hang upon a thread. Over and over again his activity and presence of mind alone saved him from death. Many times he tried to plunge his sword into the animal where the spine and the neck meet. At last came the inevitable opportunity. The bull lowered its head at the red cloak, and paused to make a surer attack. That moment's hesitation was the espada's triumph. Tearing the cloak from the sword, in an instant the thin steel blade had disappeared; the bull fell dead upon the ground.

There was no roof to raise, and the people rent the air instead. Women fluttered their fans, men waved their hats, applauded and beat a veritable devil's tattoo. Some, excited beyond bounds, threw their hats and caps into the arena. The conqueror stood im-

passive in the midst of the uproar. The trumpets blew a loud and prolonged blast. A team of mules rushed in and rushed out again with their burdens: the dead bull and the dead horses. The play was o'er.

For a few minutes there was silence and respite: breathing time. Then all began again. Another bull was launched into the arena. Again the capas, and picadores on other miserable hacks, entered; again the attendant horrors. This first part, with its cruelties to the horses, is worst of all. When six horses and two bulls had been killed, we all felt we had had enough, and departed, eight of us, in single file. No doubt the crowd looked down in pitying contempt; for they, indeed, were only just warming up to the right pitch of enthusiasm and enjoyment.



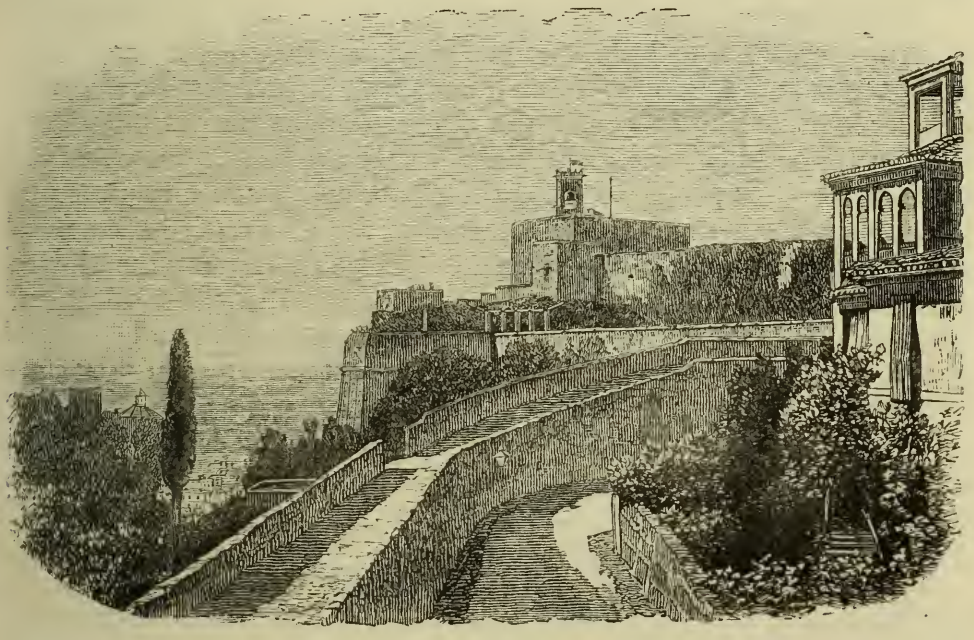
GARDEN OF LINDARAJA.

But we had had even more than we cared for. One's feelings had been properly harrowed, curiosity was satisfied. It might be the right thing to see a bull-fight once; there was no desire to see it again. Yet it is the favourite pastime of Spain; an institution firmly rooted in the hearts of the people; and at least one king has risked his popularity in endeavouring to put it down. They will have it. Its influence can only keep alive in the Spanish temperament all that is cruel, and stir up the evil that is in them. The very children, as soon as they can talk and walk and observe, are taken to the bull-fight, and grow up familiar with the sight of blood and torture. No doubt it is degrading; but where a people possesses revolutionary power and sway over a country it is difficult to discontinue anything on which it has set its heart.

After we left, five more bulls were killed and about fifteen horses.

The espada, too, nearly lost his life. Once, his foot slipped ; he did not quite fall, but the bull was able to reach him. Its horn, happily, glided in between the arm and the ribs, hurting neither, and so he escaped yet again. But what can be said in favour of those plays and pastimes where such dangers are possible?

We had heard much of the gipsies, and the gipsy dance ; of the king of the gipsies, who was really king by virtue of centuries of descent, and was said to be almost the best guitar player in Spain. It seemed right to hear these wonderful people and judge of them. They live in caves below the Alhambra, and for a consideration are prepared to put on their best, turn out, and perform. A messenger



TORRE DE LA VELA AND THE ARADERES.

was despatched desiring their attendance, and after dinner we sallied forth.

We had dined, that evening, in the open air, under the trellised vines that threw their quivering outlines across the snow-white table-cloth. Orange trees loaded the passing breeze with perfume ; myrtles and rich roses and gorgeous geranium-blooms enriched the garden. Distant mountains belted the Vega, as if they would shut out the world beyond, all cold and cruel influences, everything that intrudes. We traced their dreamy outlines ; whilst the plain reposed in all the beauty and glow and calm of a midsummer night. The sky was growing a deeper blue, the birds in the groves were singing a vesper hymn to departing day.

And we, in such influence, of what did we talk? Of poetry—Lalla Rookh—Spanish beauties—the Arabian Nights—Strains of divine music—Moonlight serenades—Elysian fields and Arcadian

bowers? Any subject that was magical and dreamy and romantic? On the contrary. Some one fired a rocket and opened up the question of politics. I remember it now. The arguments waxed warm. Each defended his colours on premises that he thought unanswerable. And when our feelings had been harrowed all round, some one put an end to the debate by declaring that, like the landlord in "Silas Marner," it was best in these days to "hold with both sides," and so have sympathy with neither. "I agree with Mr. Macey, here, as there's two opinions," says the host of the Rainbow; "and if mine was asked, I should say they're both right. Tookey's right, and Winthorp's right, and they've only got to split the difference and make themselves even."

The effrontery of such a quotation in such a cause, to the larger number present, who were sterling conservatives of the good old-fashioned sort, was too barefaced for reply. So we gave up politics, and resorted to the roses and the orange flowers, the hushing birds and the far-off hills. We turned into the long sitting-room, where the shadows were deepening, opened the piano, and made music on our own account. A small crowd gathered in the gloom of the corridor and under the windows, and when we forsook music for the gipsies we wondered to find so large an audience. Evidently other instruments besides guitars, and other songs besides moonlight serenades beneath some fair one's balcony, are appreciated in this land of impulse and passion, intrigue and romance.

We were to meet the gipsies in a house not far from the hotel; a house near the "Red Towers," overlooking the plains of the Vega, the flowing waters of the Darro, the snow-capped Sierra Nevada. Here, in an upstairs room, we awaited the tribe.

The king was the first to arrive. His guitar had preceded him in the hands of one of his subjects, who had immediately decamped. His majesty's appearance was not very regal and imposing, but when compared with those who came after, he certainly rose in one's estimation. He accepted a cigar, and smoked it whilst giving us a series of gipsy airs, now wild and discordant and with an absence of melody that would have delighted the School of the Future, and now somewhat weird and plaintive. It was a very fine instrument, and he played tolerably well; but when rumour called him one of the best players in Spain, rumour, as is her wont, had wandered very far from the Palace of Truth.

The gipsies, men and women, began to appear in ones, twos, and threes, until about sixteen or twenty had assembled. Some looked bashful as they slipped into the room and took their seats with a shy grin upon their faces. Other some would have been improved perhaps by a little more bashfulness.

For example.

One of the young women in the course of the evening came up to Broadley, and fixing her pensive eyes upon him, invited him to

emigrate with her to Salt Lake City. But I explained that he was under my care and jurisdiction; that though I felt sure so great a traveller would have been charmed to escort her to Salt Lake City, yet, unfortunately, it could not be. Indicating Mr. Edward Jago, I remarked that he was free to roam the wide world, and that if he developed a fancy for crossing the Atlantic, I should not feel called upon to offer any opposition. But there was a dignity and reserve about him that evidently rather terrified the young lady, and she returned to her seat in high displeasure. Presently, she broke out into a strain of improvisation, like another Sappho or a second Corinne. Theme and melody must have been full of wailing agony and profound despair. Agony and despair were certainly the effect it had upon some of her hearers.

Three or four of them took it in turn thus to improvise, very much after the manner of the singing we had heard—and not admired—in the cafés of Malaga. Without being quite so repulsive, it was almost as painful. The old king occasionally struck a random chord upon his guitar, which only seemed to make yet more melancholy the long-drawn cadences indulged in by the singer.

They danced a gipsy dance, and if confined to the gipsies, so much the better for the world at large. It was very graphic and demonstrative, and so energetic that sometimes one trembled for the room. The gipsies themselves thoroughly enjoyed it, if no one else did, and applauded each other when it was over. Most of them were singularly ugly and awkward, without a particle of the grace and beauty with which poetry and romance love to clothe these wandering tribes of earth.

Our politeness held out for more than an hour, and then the assembly broke up. The women surrounded us as we went down, begging for money for fairings; ribbons and garlands and other harmless vanities: nor would they be satisfied until they had cleared our pockets of whatever small change had lurked there. On the whole, the exhibition was not a success. Anyone visiting the Alhambra will lose nothing by avoiding the gipsies.

The sun had set, darkness had fallen, the moon had risen almost as large and round as last night, and, if anything, was more brilliant. Never a cloud as large as a man's hand had chequered the sky since we had left Gibraltar. The heat of day only gave place to the comparative coolness of night. To-day the grass had not grown under our feet; we had not known an idle moment. And now that it was growing late, some talked of resting from their labours. On the morrow, another long day's journey back to Malaga was in store for us. The train left at an unearthly hour, and soon after four o'clock we must again be in action.

Somehow the gipsies had left a slightly unpleasant sensation behind them, jarring like a discord in an exquisite melody. It seemed a pity to close one's day and recollections of the Alhambra with such

an experience. I proposed that we should once more visit the palace by moonlight, renew and confirm all our previous impressions. Broadley alone responded. For the others sleep seemed to have the greater charm. It was now midnight: the witching hour when ghosts might be supposed to lurk in those solemn halls. If we listened, perhaps we should hear the groans of the unhappy Abencerrages, the hollow chains in the Court of Lions.

So we started. Our guide accompanied us without a demur, notwithstanding the hour; proving, as from the commencement, the most ready and willing man in existence, to whom nothing came amiss and nothing was a trouble. In this instance we could not do without him. Our ambition was to wander at will through the halls and courts without Diogenes and his lantern to pilot us about at his own pace and pleasure. Wiley knew every inch of the ground, and under his guidance we could dispense with Diogenes.

GIPSY CAVE.

I believe that some of those we left behind regretted their decision, but since they had so decided, perhaps we were not sorry to be alone. There would be no one's time and inclination to study; we might wander about at will, and return "when so disposed."

The grove was hushed in the silence of midnight: that peculiar and mysterious influence that ever seems to envelop trees when darkness falls. It is as if they knew the secrets of life and all creation, and were pregnant with warning. The brooklet trickled over its stony bed, hastening to the broader waters of the Darro. In those solemn trees and about the walls we distinctly traced shadowy forms that certainly

were not visitors from another world. Late though the hour, we here and there heard the far-off twang of a guitar, and wondered who was being serenaded. But neither substance from this world nor shadow from another molested us, and presently the modest portal admitted one to enchanted realms. A gentle ring instantly brought forth Diogenes the wakeful. Surely the man never slept, so alert was he at the first note of entreaty for entrance. He raised his lantern, recognised old friends, and admitted them with a welcome. Then Wiley possessed himself of the lantern, and the key of the tower, and Diogenes left us to our own devices.

ENTRANCE TO THE ROYAL MOSQUE, ALHAMBRA.

It was later than last night, and the moon was higher and more brilliant, though a day past the full. Again, on entering the Court of the Myrtles, we were charmed into silence by the moonlight effect, which turned the tracery above the arches into the finest gossamer. Again it seemed that the hand of man could never have produced such a result. The still water in the long pool reflected the stars and the dark sky and outlined the massive Tower of Comares. The myrtles and the pillars threw dark shadows on the pavement. Snow-white looked the marble, where the moon fell upon it. Beneath the galleries and down the long arcades the gloom was more impenetrable and mysterious than ever.

Ghosts certainly might lurk here, if anywhere. The numerous columns of the Court of Lions might have stood for sepulchres, spirit-haunted. But the groans we listened for came not, and the clanking chains were inaudible. We saw nothing more unearthly than the bats wheeling their crazy flight about pillar and dome and

roof. Only the hooting of a distant owl broke the stillness of the midnight air.

Lovely and lonely was this Court of Lions; yet more mysterious and impressive than last night. Then all had been so new that it was seen and realised only as a dream. To-night it still had all the mystic beauty and poetry of dreamland combined with reality. We wandered through the Halls of the Abencerrages and the Ambassadors, the seven divisions of the Hall of Justice, all the long corridors and cloisters and arcades; now in broad moonlight, now feebly guided by the glimmer of the lantern. Then our master-key opened the door of the tower, and we climbed the narrow staircase for a last view.

The moon rolled in splendour. The country was flooded with her light, as clear though not as strong as that of day. Not content with our present position, a mad freak seized us. But here, if anywhere, madness is to be pardoned. With the agility of cats, we began to scale the red, pantiled roof that, slanting upwards to a dizzy point, was crowned by a lightning conductor. There we hung on to the iron, as if for dear life. It was a delicious position, intoxicating and commanding. We had risen above people and cities and worlds. In the soft luxuriance of the Southern summer night we seemed to float in ether, wafting towards the skies and the stars. With a firm hold of the rod, we hung over the precipices and revelled in the unutterable scene. Granada, belted by trees and sleeping in repose, looked like a deserted city. Its streets and houses and red roofs were clearly and distinctly outlined. We heard the distant murmuring of water, traced the flowing of the Darro, the sweep of the long avenues, whose foliage seemed to rustle in the night wind. The courts below us, and the myrtle and orange trees in the Garden of Lindaraja, were in all their beauty of light and shadow. Beyond the town the great plain of the Vega and the far-off hills stretched outwards and upwards in silent majesty, and the snows of the Sierra Nevada looked soft and sleeping in the moonbeams.

Moment after moment passed. It was impossible to forsake this paradise, more beautiful than anything we had ever seen or imagined. Well for us that the iron rod held its place, or a diminished party might have returned to the Reserve Squadron. But the temptation of reaching that highest point had been irresistible, and we had our reward.

Gliding down those tiles proved a harder task than the getting up, yet it had to be done. Presently we found ourselves on terra firma, if a little lower in the world. It was now nearly two in the morning, and wisdom suggested the necessity of at least some rest and respite before commencing the labours of another day. Nothing could again equal that moonlight view, soft, beautiful and romantic, as we had seen and revelled in it from the tower's giddy height. It should be our last recollection, worthy the place and the occasion, of all that

had gone before, of living for ever in the memory. So we lingered no more as we slowly went through the courts of the palace. The key and the lantern were delivered to the amiable Diogenes, we bade him farewell, and passed out into the ordinary world. The door of this enchanted ground closed upon us.

Back at the "Washington Irving," we sought our pillows; but to one at least sleep came not. Before his closed eyes there passed a continuous vision of the bull-fight, with all its horrors vivid as we had seen them in the afternoon. When the guide came up between four and five to call us, he found me girded and ready for battle.

"Wiley," I said, "have you not been to bed? I thought the waiters were to see to us this morning."

"So they were, sir," he replied; "but these Spanish waiters are good for nothing. You can't depend upon them. When they have to wake me early I generally find that I have to get up first and call them to do it. Please, sir," he continued, "I've done my best to wake Captain Broadley, and I can't succeed. He keeps muttering something about dancing and gipsies and Salt Lake City, and is plunging about the bed like an obstinate camel. I can't for the life of me imagine what he's driving at, and feel rather frightened. Would you mind coming, sir, and trying to rouse him? There's no time to lose."

So in I went, and found Broadley in delirium.

"Come, come," I said, "wake up. It's gone eight bells. We've only just time to dress and catch the train."

He opened his eyes vacantly, to close them the next moment in dreamland.

"Belles—belles!" he muttered. "Eight belles—sixteen belles!" He was evidently counting last night's assembly. "Atlantic—Utah—Brigham Young—fine institution—shame, old fellah—tyranny. . . ."

It took five minutes, and our joint efforts, to rouse him. Then all at once he sprang up and turned out, ready for action.

"What were you dreaming about?" I asked.

"I dreamed that we were in the Bay of Biscay," he answered, as readily as possible. "The good old *Defence* was rolling—as she *can* roll. It was Sunday morning. We were all assembled on the upper deck, waiting for the parson to begin service. They had turned me into the clerk, and I had to say Amen, as a reward for good conduct. So I was working myself up into an extra-devout frame of mind, when you came and woke me and spoilt it all. Funny dream, wasn't it?" cried he, looking at me with large eyes full of innocence.

"Very," I answered, in the same spirit. "But now make haste and tub and dress, or you won't have the chance of saying Amen or anything else on board the *Defence*, for we shall lose the train. Like time and tide, it waits for no man."

But we did not lose it. Needless to say that we turned our back

with regret upon the Alhambra and its charmed precincts. At the railway station the train was getting up steam. The bull-fighters of yesterday were on the platform, seeking fresh fields and fights. One or two of them looked worthy of better things, but the greater part did not.

Once more on the way, towards Malaga. We had gone through so much, that a week, not two days, seemed to have elapsed since we had travelled over these lines. One familiar spot after another was passed. At Loja we bought another basket of crayfish, at Bobadilla halted for another breakfast. Between three and four in the afternoon we reached Malaga, settled ourselves at the hotel, and went forth to visit the cathedral, of which we had not yet seen the interior.

It is of Græco-Roman architecture, like that of Granada, but smaller. Of the exterior, little is visible except the large and effective façade, with its splendid arches supported by Corinthian pillars. The cathedral stands on the site of a mosque, dating back to the days of the Moors, but has been built and altered and added to, with a result not very satisfactory. The interior is large and lofty, and is divided into three naves by fluted pillars. The effect is not good, and is cold and lifeless. From the tower, which is nearly 400 feet high, we had a glorious view of the town, the great plain, the hills that protect Malaga from the East, and, above all, the far-stretching, lovely blue waters of the Mediterranean. Coming down was almost as bad as Jacob's Ladder had been at Gibraltar, and seemed as interminable.

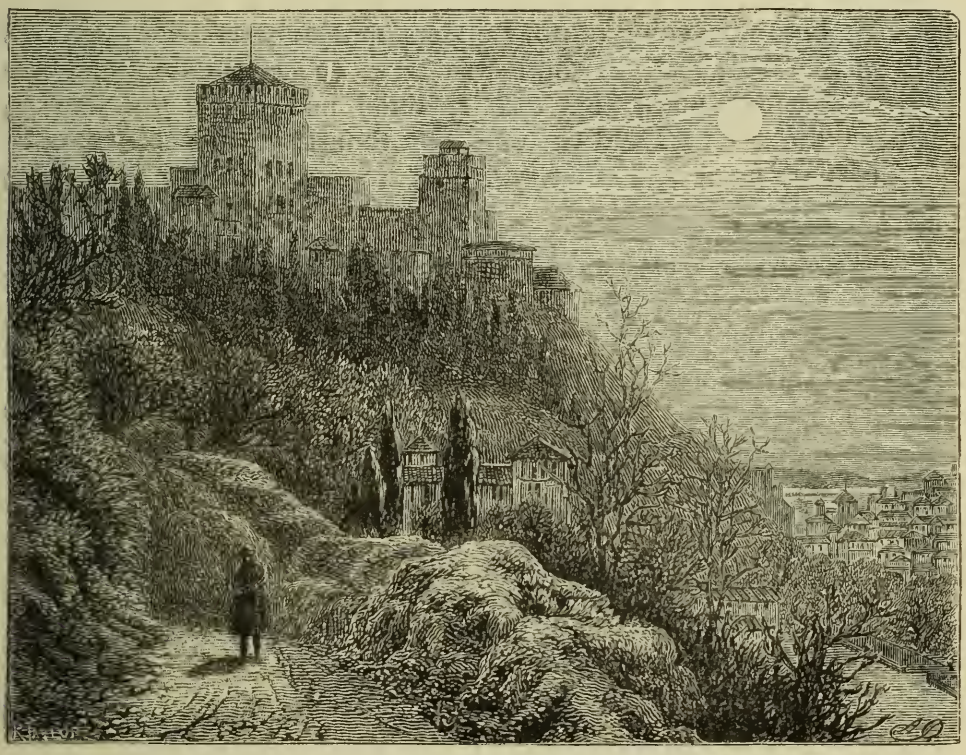
Crossing the square, where a few nights ago we had heard those blind players and watched the gambling, I was attracted—as surely as the needle to the pole—by sounds of harmony issuing from a modest clockmaker's. A piano was being really splendidly played. I went up and listened, and everything and everybody was forgotten in the music. Mr. Jago and Broadley stood some fifty yards off, gazing, patiently wondering how long they would have to gaze. At last they approached, and observed mildly, but in a tone of veiled sarcasm, that they would call again for me in an hour's time. They were in want of the courier to act as interpreter, and he had been left at the hotel.

Away they went, and presently out came the clockmaker's wife, and politely asked me to go in and sit down—at least I should hear the music more comfortably. So I entered, and discovered in the musician an interesting lad of sixteen, who had not long learned, yet had all the best and most difficult music at his fingers' ends, played with singular skill and correctness. For an hour and more he charmed me into forgetfulness of time. Before leaving he told me that he was half French, half German; that his own mother was dead—she had been French—and his father wanted to bring him up to the clockmaking. He would like to study at one of the great Conservatoriums of Germany, but feared his father would not consent.

So I argued the matter with the father—who seemed proud of his

son's talent and pleased with any notice—advised him to give up the idea of making his son a watchmaker, and to cultivate the genius he possessed. The old man promised to think about it seriously. Then giving the young musician a name and address, I told him that some years hence, when astonishing and delighting the world, he would come and tell me how he had worked and studied, the battles he had fought, the victories he had won.

By this time the absentees had returned, and we strolled back to the hotel. There, after dinner, in a quiet sitting-room upstairs, we listened to a young inhabitant of Malaga, who was said to be one



THE ALHAMBRA.

of the best guitar players in Spain—and no doubt is so. Pale, melancholy, and refined, his appearance bespoke our sympathies whilst his playing charmed us. Moment after moment passed, beguiled by his airs and improvisations, until the hour struck for the steamer.

Upon this the gentleman who had introduced the player to us insisted that he should go on board also. It was a happy thought. Upon the water, in the moonlight of the soft summer night, we listened to sounds and strains full of poetry and refinement, and plaintive airs full of tender charm and sympathy. It was our closing impression of Malaga, and the Alhambra,—this guitar playing on the deck of the French steamer, in the brilliant moonbeams that lighted up the calm, tideless waters of the Mediterranean; whilst

the sweet sad strains, lovely, dreamy and romantic, floated over the surface, and lost themselves in the dark warm skies above. A fitting termination to a succession of days and experiences that come only once and again in a lifetime.

The steamer started on her way. She was large and palatial compared with the little cockle-shell that had brought us down—yet brought us safely. There were cabins and berths ad libitum, and we were glad to turn in. Four o'clock the next morning found us at Gibraltar, alongside the Reserve Squadron, waiting for "Pratique" to present us with a clean bill of health and permission to return to our vessels.

The boat was going on to Tangiers, and some of us—ready to do or die—determined, as there was time, to cross over and see the wonderful old place that has retained unchanged the ways and whims, the manners and customs of a thousand years ago.

How we fared and what we saw there must be the subject of the next paper.

REST SONG.

LET no wild winds rage round this charmèd place
Nor lurid lightnings rend these arching trees;
But passing clouds and babbling voice of breeze,
And all things glad and all things full of grace
For this thy Rest!

Here timid Spring, so fickle yet so sweet,
Shall bring her wealth of bursting buds and leaves,
With gleaming swallows flying to their eaves,
And sights and sounds to make a joyance meet
For this thy Rest!

When from the east the purple, star-gemmed night
Soothes, with soft hand, the humid heats of June,
From brush and brake shall swell the wondrous tune
Of eager nightingales, secure from sight,
For this thy Rest!

When honest Autumn, russet-red and gold,
Comes forth, with gladness of the reapers' song,
Here let the waning sun-light linger long,
And starry flowers, though all without be cold,
For this thy Rest!

Sad white-robed Winter here shall stay his hand,
And fair frost-feathers on this grass shall fling,
While from the thorn the robin's voice shall sing
His wistful music of the Far-off Land
For this thy Rest!

T. S. CUNNINGHAM.

MRS. CARR'S COMPANION.

By Mary Grace Wightwick, Author of "In Lands of Palm."

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW THE NEWS WAS TOLD.

THOROLD was passing up and down the sunny but somewhat limited quarter-deck walk in his uncle's garden, reading his *Times* in a desultory sort of way, and listening for the first stroke of the bells which were to announce the transformation of Rose Egerton into Rose Kane.

Five minutes after five minutes passed. The wedding had been fixed for ten o'clock, that the bridal pair might cross the Channel that same afternoon. It was long past that hour, but still no sound disturbed the quiet of the Close. Suddenly Thorold perceived his Aunt coming out of the house and hurrying towards him at a brisk pace, her round eyes more widely open than usual, and agitation expressed on every feature.

"John! John! What do you think has happened? Such a scandal! How will Lady Mary bear it—so proud as she is!"

Thorold crushed his newspaper together and looked up, as much roused as his aunt could wish.

"What is it? Nothing to do with—with Olive?"

"Oh, no. With all her faults, Olive would never have done such a thing!" Thorold's brow cleared. "It is her sister. There will be no wedding—at least, not here. She eloped this morning with Captain Kane."

"Aunt! Is this true; or only some gossip's detestable fabrication?"

"True! the news is all round the Close by this time.—John! where are you going?"

"To see the Archdeacon."

"Of course! of course. But ah! John, what a time to bring them more bad news."

Indeed, Thorold had all the morning been dreading the task he had taken upon himself, and was not in the best of spirits as he walked across the Close, meeting on his way two or three carriages filled with people in gala costume, the last of the guests hurrying away from the interrupted festivities. His ring at the open front door was unheeded, the domestics being probably engaged somewhere in the back regions, gossiping over the events of the morning. After waiting some minutes he grew impatient, and entered unannounced.

Through the half-open dining-room door he caught a glimpse of the untasted banquet; flowers, fruit, the neglected wedding-cake towering up amongst them, a snowy splendour. A basket of now useless bridal favours lay overturned on the hall-table. A man-servant came hurrying past him carrying a portmanteau, then Colonel Kane's own man with a hat-box and some rugs, which he placed in a close carriage that had just stopped at the gate.

Not wishing to encounter the unfortunate bridegroom, Thorold turned aside into the breakfast-room close by, which he imagined to be unoccupied. But no; moving to and fro with restless step was Olive, still in her bridesmaid's dress of pale cashmere, her face deathly white, her hands tightly clasped together. She came to meet him mechanically, seeming to think it a matter of course he should be there even on such a day.

"You have heard?" she asked, with averted face, as he paused, speechless.

"The facts, but no particulars. You must forgive my intrusion at such a time, but—I wished to speak to the Archdeacon." He had hoped that his appearance might have aroused some apprehension, which would have prepared her for his ill-news. Her utter unconsciousness made his heart sink.

"He is waiting to say good-bye to Colonel Kane when he leaves my mother."

"And how is Lady Mary?"

The pity in his tone was almost more than Olive could bear. If Lady Mary could have heard herself spoken of compassionately—and by John Thorold!

"She is calm and composed as usual, though the first shock was terrible. A telegram arrived half-an-hour ago. They—Captain Kane and Rose—were married this morning at nine o'clock."

"Not here?"

"No; at Woodchurch, about six miles off. Rose stole away before seven this morning and met him there. She had begged not to be disturbed till the last moment, and we never discovered her absence until I went to her room at nine. My mother would explain everything to the guests and dismiss them herself. It was dreadful to see her moving so calmly from one to another in her dignified way, but with a face like marble—so white and still."

She took another turn across the room, for her composure was failing her. This trouble of theirs, which brought disgrace on their fair name had, as Thorold knew, its special bitterness for the proud Egertons. He thought of some lines he had read somewhere:

"In all the ills we bore
We grieved, we sighed, we wept, we never blushed before!"

Steps were heard in the hall. Olive, who was near the window, turned even paler than before, and shrank into the shadow of the curtain, as Colonel Kane passed it with rapid step and hat pressed

down over his eyes, sprang into the waiting carriage and was driven away. The bridegroom! He who should have left that door in joy and triumph! Olive covered her face with her hands. Thorold longed for the right to try and comfort her, but he dared not intrude upon that proud and tearless grief.

The sound of voices was heard approaching, and Olive started up. "I must go to my mother."

But as she spoke the door opened and Lady Mary herself came in. Thorold moved aside with a silent bow, but she advanced and gave him her hand with gracious stateliness, although he read in her absent eyes that her thoughts were far away. He summoned up courage, for he felt that this opportunity of breaking his ill-tidings must not be lost.

While he stood hesitating how to begin Lady Mary addressed him. For all the blow she had received the old haughtiness was perceptible in her tone.

"You find us in some confusion, Mr. Thorold. Circumstances have put a stop to our festivities, as Close gossip has probably already told you."

"Yes, and I must ask your pardon, Lady Mary, for intruding my presence upon you at such a time, but it is my duty. There is some ill-news which you ought to know."

She sat upright in her chair and fixed upon him a rigid gaze which made the words falter upon his tongue.

"Ill-news! of her who has disgraced us all and made us a jest and a mockery! What more ill-news can there be to hear of her?"

Olive stole up, chilled by those bitter words, and touched her mother's arm imploringly.

"Lady Mary! I know nothing of your *daughter*, it is ——" His emphasis struck the keynote of his news.

"Not Miles?" she whispered, hoarsely, starting forward.

His face answered the question before he spoke. "There has been fighting in South Africa. The telegram reports Captain Egerton as severely wounded. Oh! Lady Mary, take courage! Hope is left to you. It is not with you as with some whose homes have been made desolate at a stroke."

His concluding words fell upon unheeding ears. Lady Mary had fallen back fainting, and it was an unconscious form which Olive supported so tenderly. Thorold, at a sign from her, rang the bell and hastened in search of assistance more effectual than his own. Lady Mary's maid was quickly on the spot, but it was long before her efforts and Olive's could re-awaken her to the consciousness which was followed by a wave of miserable recollection.

A full half-hour had elapsed, which Thorold spent with the Archdeacon, before the maid came announcing that her mistress was better and wished to see Mr. Thorold if he were still in the house. Thorold looked at the Archdeacon, who nodded an assent.

"Go, go; she will not be gainsaid when she has set her mind on a thing."

Lady Mary was lying upon a low couch near the fire, looking as though years had passed over her head since a few hours ago. Olive stood close by, watching her wistfully.

"Mr. Thorold, will you show me that telegram?"

He pulled the *Times* from his pocket, silently found the paragraph, and handed it to her. She looked at it a moment, then it dropped from her nerveless hand.

"It is of no use, my eyes are dim," she said, faintly. "Olive, you must read it to me."

Olive obeyed.

"And there is nothing more? You are sure—not a word?"

"Nothing, mother. When shall we hear?" she questioned of Thorold.

"In a few days, perhaps, some news of the wounded, but no particulars for some time."

Lady Mary lay still, with closed eyes. Olive was beginning to fear a return of the faintness, but presently she opened them and spoke again.

"That poor girl—is she still here?"

Olive instantly divined whither her thoughts had flown.

"Viola, mamma? She went to Miss Hammond—don't you remember?"

"Does she know?"

"I blurted the news out suddenly when I came in last night, not knowing how it would affect her," Thorold confessed, guiltily.

Lady Mary half raised herself upon her elbow. "And she knew when I dismissed her so cruelly?"

"Yes. I had begged her not to betray the news, and she kept her own counsel bravely."

Lady Mary said nothing, but John saw that unwonted tears stood in her eyes. "Is Miss Romayne still with you?" ventured Olive, timidly.

"Oh, yes; my aunt has asked her to remain a day or two, until we can hear more."

"She must come back," murmured Lady Mary to herself. Then suddenly breaking down she cried out: "Ah! Olive! I denied my boy's last wish, and who knows if I shall ever have the power of granting him another!"

Finding that he could be of no further use Thorold took leave, promising to return with the evening papers to the anxious mother and sister.

Another watcher, no less torn with suspense, was passing the weary hours as best she might, now pacing the room in restless impatience, now trying to rouse herself to listen to her kind

hostess, who would look in occasionally with fragments of Close gossip, or conjectures about the startling events of the day.

It was evident that the town talk did not spare Lady Mary. Her haughty independence of character had won her many enemies, who, now in the hour of her downfall, rushed in to administer each one the midge-like stings they would not have dared at any other time. Whether or no in her secret heart Miss Hammond were inclined to agree with this censure of the pride and exclusiveness which had met with such a fall, she did not vent her opinions in hearing of her guest. Viola would not have borne to hear Lady Mary blamed, though wounded to the core herself by her harsh, cruel words, which stung all the more deeply coming from Miles's mother: the mother towards whom her heart went out so wistfully. And now, even Olive had deserted her. Oh! the bitter disappointment of that rejected appeal! As she thought of it her heart hardened against the friend whose sympathy had failed her in the hour of need.

Viola found it difficult to realise that all her hopes of winning her way into the hearts of Miles's people had vanished once and for all. With their love to encourage and support her, her terrible trial might have been comparatively easy to bear, but now she must tread her Via Dolorosa alone. In a few days more she must leave even the temporary refuge which now sheltered her, and go forth into a world void of all friendly sympathy, to wait—wait—wait.

Of the awful possibility which lay upon the other side of that dreary gulf of suspense and anxiety she dared not even think. That could only be faced in a strength not her own, a strength which even now she was seeking in her solitude, with a childlike faith that, although all other supports might fail, there still remained to her "the Everlasting Arms."

Viola was no stranger to sorrow. Only a short year ago that blow had fallen upon her whose lesser stings of shame and disgrace had been deadened in the greater grief of its dreadful tragedy.

Then into the very midst of her desolate loneliness had come Miles Egerton, with his chivalrous love, interpenetrating her sorrow, thrusting it through and through with threads of happiness, which gleamed all the brighter for their dark background. How well she remembered that winter's afternoon, when she sat in her ruined home, dressed for the first time after days of illness and prostration in the black draperies which yet were but pale emblems of her sorrow, and he had come in and surprised her in the midst of her grieving, and begged her to give him the right to comfort her. In his generous chivalry he had pleaded as humbly, as diffidently, with as much deference as though she were the Queen upon her throne and he the beggar at her feet. And when her heart was already on his side how could she withstand his importunity! In her days of happy prosperity, on the pleasant lawns of Fairhurst, he had always

been a welcome guest, preferred above all others. Many then had envied Miles Egerton the favour of the rich banker's heiress, who now that she was heiress no longer, but ruined, with a cloud upon her name, passed by on the other side and ignored her existence. But he was loyal still, and she could not send him from her.

Viola's sorrow and joy were only a few weeks old when Captain Egerton suddenly received orders for South Africa, with the tempting offer of an appointment on the staff of his mother's old friend, General B. In spite of the compliment paid him, never was summons more unwelcome. He could not bear the thought of leaving Viola without even the protection of his name, and hurried down to St. Brenda's to enlist his mother's sympathy for his betrothed and to gain her consent to an immediate marriage. But notwithstanding all his eloquence, Lady Mary's determined opposition justified poor Viola's misgivings. The immediate result of her son's visit was a letter in her own hand to Miss Romayne, despatched unknown to Miles while he still lingered at St. Brenda's.

It was laconic, courteous, to the point; an appeal to Viola's generosity to release her son from an engagement which, if fulfilled, must ruin his prospects for life. If, considering himself bound in honour, he should refuse to accept his liberty, she then begged Viola to give him the opportunity for reflection before taking such an irrevocable step, asking her, as a favour, to hold no correspondence with Captain Egerton during his absence from England. If both stood the test of separation, and, on his return, he chose to renew his suit as the result not of impulse but of sober judgment, Lady Mary promised to withdraw all open opposition, although she could never willingly receive as a daughter "one whose personal qualities, however estimable, were so greatly outweighed by the disadvantages of her position, &c." Viola had the cold, cruel letter still, and read it over from time to time, always with the same icy chill which she had felt on first perusing it. The thick uncompromising paper, bearing the Egerton arms on a lozenge, was becoming soft and pliable with much unfolding.

Viola had a whole day for reflection before Miles's return. By that time her mind was made up. She spread the letter before him and gently told him that so it must be, with a sweet, yet firm decision, which forbade remonstrance. She made him send a message from her to his mother, promising compliance with her wishes; and with a brave smile and inward tears bade him go away, and, for his own sake, forget her if he could.

"But you will not, Miles—it is that which makes the parting easy. You will come back faithful to me still, and the probation over, your mother will be satisfied, and we shall live happy ever after, as the story-books say."

She tried to reassure him with a semblance of unusual gaiety, but Miles groaned to himself, and could not be deceived.

"I cannot forgive my mother for placing you in such a position and taking advantage of your unselfishness. It is all such bosh and nonsense. If she only knew you—prejudice apart—she must learn to love you."

"And who knows but that while you are away accident may bring us together? More improbable things have happened."

Miles shook his head. He was not to be talked out of his desponding mood so easily. To go so far away out of sight and hearing was a sore trial, and it was well that the short notice given him left little time to dwell upon it. For those few days Viola managed to keep up an appearance of cheerfulness, but when the strain was at an end, and the last good-bye had been said, the reaction was all the more terrible. A great heart-breaking burden of sorrow lay at Lady Mary's door during the weeks that followed.

Viola, by this time, had left the luxurious home, haunted of late by so many painful memories. She had laid aside with the remnants of his wealth even the very name of the rich banker that was now so unhappily notorious; and calling herself by her mother's maiden name of Keith, had hidden herself alike from the comments and pity of her acquaintance, in one of the quiet old streets round about Bloomsbury, where she could remain insignificant and unnoticed. Near relations she had none, friends but few, and of these, none of whom she was willing to ask a favour, but a kind-hearted elderly governess in whose home she found a temporary refuge.

It was there that a few weeks after her arrival she came across one of Lady Mary's all too frequent advertisements for a Lady Companion to an invalid, and obeying a sudden impulse resolved to seize the opportunity of realising her prediction, which fortune seemed purposely to have placed in her way. She had heard enough from Miles of Mrs. Carr's peculiarities to be convinced that she was entering upon a difficult undertaking, but with so much depending upon success she would not be deterred from attempting the task. Anything was preferable to her present aimless, idle life; she had already determined to work, and if she must go among strangers, who so near to her as the family in St. Brenda's Close, of whom Miles always spoke so lovingly! A few letters, a pleasant interview with Lady Mary's sister, Lady Anne Conyers, in Berkeley Square, and all was arranged. Viola entered upon her duties as Mrs. Carr' companion, and upon her self-imposed task of winning the affections of Miles Egerton's mother and sisters.

CHAPTER XIV.

RECONCILED.

It was already dusk when Thorold returned to the dark old house in the corner of the Close, and having asked for Olive, waited long and patiently in the empty drawing-room for her appear-

ance. At last she came in, moving languidly, and looking the mere wreck of herself as she sank wearily into the nearest chair.

"I see you have no better news for us," she began, in a desponding tone, reading his grave face. "Poor mamma!"

"I hope Lady Mary is better?" he asked, anxiously.

"Indeed, no. She seems quite feverish this evening, and my uncle is trying to persuade her to see a doctor. Then she alternately blames herself for thwarting poor Miles's attachment to Viola, and grieves over her absence. If only that wretched Captain Kane had never written that malicious letter! My aunt, too, is furious with my mother for sending her away—declares that no one else ever served her so well, and that Miles showed his sense in appreciating her, which is more than we could do. Then to hear her abuse poor Rose, and say it is what she always expected of her! I would not go near my aunt to hear such talk, but there is no one else to look after her, now Viola is gone. Everything seems to go wrong to-day!"

It seemed a relief to unburden her overwrought feelings to so sympathising a listener. But the indulgence could be but brief. In a few moments she started up.

"I must take mamma some tea. Will you ring the bell, please? I told them to have it ready."

"And what have you had yourself? Anything since morning?"

"Yes—no; I really forget,—someone brought me a biscuit, I think."

"Then we will make sure. You must let me get you a glass of wine before you do anything more. Sit still. I shall find it."

He returned successful from his forage, and waited on her while she ate some biscuits and drank the wine.

"There, now you look a little more like yourself. Don't neglect your own health in nursing Lady Mary," he said kindly, almost tenderly. "And now I must go home. Miss Keith (I can't learn to call her Miss Romayne) will be waiting anxiously for news."

"Ah! poor Viola! If I could but see her a moment and ask her to forgive my unkindness last night. I was wrong to be so hard upon her!"

The confession was a great deal coming from Olive, who so seldom in her life had deigned to say, "*Peccavi!*" But where her affections were concerned, Olive was all warmth and generosity, as John had discovered long since. He told himself that he was glad —yes, *glad*—that his brief holiday at St. Brenda's came to an end on the morrow. Olive was more dangerous to his peace of mind now, in this broken mood of humility, than in all her pride of beauty and high spirits. He took the image of that pale, wan face, those sorrowful eyes, back with him across the Close, and it dwelt with him all the evening, coming between him and his book so that he could not read a word of it.

It seemed only a natural embodiment of his mental visions when, going out into the hall later on, he met a rush of wintry wind from the opening front door; and borne in as it were upon that dreary blast, there entered Olive herself, looking only more weary and colourless than her pictured presence in his mind.

He hastily went to meet her, half-fearing some new misfortune.

"Can I speak to Viola a minute?" she asked, eagerly. "I am afraid it is very late, but if Miss Hammond will excuse me, I should so like—indeed, I *must* see her."

He hesitated. "Miss Keith is in the drawing-room with my aunt; but if you will come upstairs ——"

Olive's wan face flushed slightly.

"I would rather have seen her alone, but she might refuse me admittance, and I cannot risk that. Lead the way, please."

Thorold felt very compassionate for Olive as she climbed the stairs wearily after him, for he knew what this visit cost one so proud and high-spirited. He doubted, too, what her reception might be, for he had gathered that Viola's feelings had been deeply wounded.

However, there was little time for Olive either to repent or grow nervous, for in a few seconds they were at the drawing-room door, which Thorold hastily threw open. Miss Hammond, who had been nodding decorously over her book, looked up in sleepy wonder at the interruption. Viola greeted him with one of the languid smiles which, in these days, were her nearest approach to cheerfulness; but when her eyes fell upon the visitor whom he was ushering in, the smile died out and she drew herself up stiffly. Miss Hammond could not have believed her gentle visitor to be capable of such haughtiness, and, tender-hearted little woman that she was, felt quite sorry for Miss Egerton as she came forward almost humbly.

In some precipitation she got up to welcome her, turning then to Viola with some faint idea of peace-making. But Viola's cold, rigid face gave her little hope of successful mediation. She had risen and stood drawn up to her full height, with her large dark eyes fixed upon the intruder, upon whom was thus thrown the burden of explanation. Olive took her courage in both hands and made a step forward. "Viola!" she said, softly, holding out her hand. But Viola folded hers tightly together, looking straight before her, stern and rigid still, and Olive was suddenly and painfully reminded that it was now her turn to be a rejected suppliant. The fugitive colour crimsoned her cheek again, but she persisted, feeling braver as the sound of the closing door assured her that they were alone at last.

"Viola!" she cried again. "I have come to ask your pardon for my unkindness last night. Won't you speak to me? Won't you forgive me when we are both so unhappy?" She ventured nearer, trying to catch a glimpse of Viola's averted face. But there was no answer.

"I deserve that you should be angry," she owned, dejectedly, but forgive me, Viola, *for Miles's sake*, if not for my own!" Instinct had taught her the plea most likely to be successful. Viola turned, and the next minute the girls were sobbing in each others' arms. Not all the sorrows of that dreadful day had hitherto wrung a tear from Olive, but now they came thick and fast as she hung on Viola's neck and wept out her grief and shame and misery. Viola could understand. No words were wanted.

Presently Olive found herself in the low chair which her friend had vacated, with Viola on the rug at her feet, holding her hand and stroking it gently from time to time. She heaved a deep sigh of relief.

"Ah! Viola, you have given me some little comfort, for it has added to the misery of this most miserable of days to remember my unkind behaviour to you. When you were in such trouble already, too, and bearing it bravely for our sakes!"

"Mr. Thorold came and asked me to help him conceal the news. He little guessed —— oh! Olive!" Her head went down into her hands for a moment, and a quiver she could not repress shook her whole frame. Olive stooped over her with a silent caress, which said more than any words.

"I think one blow has deadened the other for me," broke out poor Olive, presently, with a groan. "I don't seem able to realise what has happened, or what shame and disgrace it all means! Oh! Rose! Rose! That wretched Wilfred Kane! What can a life be ike begun in such a way!"

"I always mistrusted him," Viola said, slowly, "though often I have blamed myself for unreasonable prejudice. I knew him before —at Fairhurst—and disliked him even then."

"To be sure," said Olive, wondering; "I remember that at first he spoke of you with great admiration." Viola coloured so guiltily that Olive continued: "Why, what is this? Viola! I do believe ——"

"Yes; he once asked me to marry him. We were rich then, for it was before my great trouble. When we met again at St. Brenda's he took care to let me know that though his admiration was not changed his intentions were."

"Coward!" exclaimed Olive, indignantly.

"The warning was unnecessary," said Viola, simply, drawing herself up ever so slightly. "My opinion of him was unchanged too. Poor, poor Rose!"

"Poor Rose, indeed, to be so deluded. Oh! Viola! I fear she is the victim of a double treachery! The horrible dread comes over me sometimes that it was not Rose alone, but his uncle's wife that Wilfred Kane wished to entice away! The property is entailed, you know, and he is next heir. If I were Colonel Kane I would marry even now to spite him!"

"He will never do that," said Viola, in a tone of conviction.

"Not a chance of it. And, oh! dreadful to think of, Rose's children—if she have any—may some day profit by Rose's sin! Ah! Viola! this disgrace is the deeper grief of the two! Heaven grant we may be spared more sorrow! It would break my mother's heart."

And now, Viola first ventured to speak Lady Mary's name. There was a conscious change in her voice as she did so, for she recalled her as she had appeared the evening before, giving sentence in her stern, judicial way. "How does she bear it?" she asked, gently.

"The blow of this morning?—better than might have been expected; but this bad news of Miles, coming close upon it, almost crushed her. She is worse this evening,—worn out, yet too restless to sleep. Dr. Moore seems anxious about her. She harasses herself, too about you and Miles, and reproaches herself for what happened last night. Viola, she wants you to come back that she may tell you so."

Viola hastily dropped the hand she held.

"No; I cannot do that, Olive. Things have changed. Lady Mary has dismissed Mrs. Carr's companion. I cannot go back!"

"Not as my aunt's companion, but as one whom we must all love for Miles's sake," whispered Olive, softly.

"Ah! no, Olive! Miles's love has brought me nothing but hate from his people. I once had a hope that Viola Keith might win some little liking for Viola Romayne, but the hope died out as I looked in your mother's face last night. If you could but know the bitter, bitter disappointment!"

"Poor Viola! I understand."

"I had given your mother my promise to hold no correspondence with Miles! but when opportunity offered and I saw her advertisement, how could I resist coming to the one place in all the world where I could hear news of him!—hear at least his name sometimes spoken!"

"Dear Viola, I did not think it had gone so far! We have been cruel. But my mother blames herself as much as you can blame her; a trouble like this brings one face to face with the realities of life. At least be forgiving, and come and speak to her. You know my mother's pride. It costs her something to ask you this. Don't let her have to ask in vain!"

Viola was touched, and though she still hesitated, Olive saw by her moistened eyes and softening features that the victory was won.

Thorold was scarcely surprised when, in place of one, there presently appeared on the stairs *two* cloaked and muffled figures.

"Dear Miss Hammond, I am going to run away for half an hour," said Viola to her greatly astonished hostess. "Don't wait up for me. I am sure Mr. Thorold will bring me safely back."

For John had silently taken down his hat and was waiting to escort them. Almost in silence the trio crossed the Close, and with

a mingling of many feelings, Viola re-entered the house she had so lately quitted in disgrace.

The household, it was evident, had not yet recovered the shock of the morning; it was still out of gear, and the confusion caused by the sudden illness of the mistress, who was its mainspring, was visible everywhere. Doors were yawning open, shutters were unshut. The two girls stumbled up the dim, unlighted stairs to the corridor outside Lady Mary's room. The door opened and her maid came out, carrying a tray. With the quickened perceptions of an invalid, Lady Mary heard the steps and voices outside.

"Who is there?" she called, impatiently.

Then as the door was pushed wider and admitted a dark, cloaked figure. "Olive! Is that you? Have you seen her?" She raised herself upon her elbow and waited eagerly for the answer, and then someone, who was not Olive, glided forward and throwing back the hood of her ulster, showed the pale, wistful face of Viola Romayne.

A moment she stood there hesitating to approach, but Lady Mary put out her hand with a broken cry: "Child! child! what have I to do any more with pride! You love him, too; we will weep and wait together!" Then Viola, throwing herself upon her knees by the bedside, took the slim white hand in hers and covered it with tears and kisses.

CHAPTER XV.

NEWS FROM THE WAR.

Of course Viola went back to the Corner House, and became very necessary to Lady Mary in the weeks of fever and prostration which followed that sad wedding-day.

It was grievous to see one usually so full of decision and energy to plan for others—the strong-willed woman, who held the reins of government with a firm hand as absolute ruler in her little circle—prostrate now in mind and body, dependent for the tiniest service upon the two young nurses who served her with such unwearied devotion. The poor Archdeacon, deprived of the staff upon which he was wont to lean, would come with noiseless steps and a rueful countenance to look and wonder over her, and go away again, more depressed than before, to his musty hieroglyphics.

Anxiety with Mrs. Carr, on the contrary, took a different turn. The presence of suffering greater than her own subdued her, and to poor Olive's great relief she put up patiently with neglect, and was content with the few occasional visits which were all either Viola or herself could manage. Mrs. Carr was really attached to her sister-in-law, and showed it now in Lady Mary's time of trouble by keeping her personal grievances in the background.

To Viola she showed unexpected favour. She had chosen to espouse her cause from the first, and having elected her position

clung to it with characteristic persistence; and from the hour of Viola's return, treated her as one who was soon to become a member of the family. This conduct embarrassed Viola, however she might be gratified by Mrs. Carr's preference. Her position just now seemed full of perplexities, and she was glad to be shut away in Lady Mary's sick-room, apart from the necessity of solving them. There at least she was at home, and loved, and appreciated, as every look and touch told her continually. The guerdon for which she had striven so hard was earned at last! Yet words there were few, while Lady Mary lay day after day in a state of alternate fever and prostration, only living, as it seemed, for those occasional reports from the Cape which told Miles's nearest and dearest no more than they told all the world. "*Wounded doing well.*" "*Wounded progressing favourably.*" That was all for days and days which seemed never ending.

Then one dreadful morning came an exception. "*Wounded going on well; all but Captain Egerton, who is in a critical state.*"

What tears were shed in secret over that telegram by Olive and Viola!—tears all the more bitter that they must be hidden from Lady Mary. And oh! the relief as the bulletins began to improve once more, and allowed hope to steal into their hearts again!

Public sympathy was not wanting during these days of trial, and many and frequent were the calls and letters and messages. But what pleased Olive and her uncle more than all was the kind attention shown by Colonel Kane. Not only did he several times enquire in person, but almost every day his servant was to be seen at the Archdeacon's door asking the latest bulletin of the invalid, or leaving a basket of some choice fruits or flowers which his master hoped would please Lady Mary. And though a sting lurked among the fragrant blossoms, and a taste of gall flavoured the luscious grapes, Colonel Kane's silently received gifts were appreciated none the less.

Of course it was natural that Mrs. Warburton should make use of the present excellent opportunity of bemoaning her "dear cousin's ill-fortune," which she declared went to her heart: she could think of nothing else but the trouble which had befallen those dear relations of hers in the Close.

Indeed her anxiety to prove kinship to the Egertons by an extra amount of sympathy very nearly impaled Mrs. Warburton upon the horns of a dilemma. A day or two after Rose's ill-fated wedding, Mrs. Warburton returning from an expedition to leave an early card of enquiry at Lady Mary's door, found her drawing-room occupied by a certain Mrs. McKerrel and her brother, Captain Smythe, both welcome visitors, as coming from the Barracks.

Sinking into the nearest chair, their hostess immediately began upon the sad history of the Egerton troubles, deploring that she had been completely upset by them. Mrs. McKerrel shook her head sympathisingly, extracted one or two utterly false particulars from

Mrs. Warburton, "who, of course, being Lady Mary's own cousin, ought to know," as she confided to a friend later; and then ended sadly: "My brother had hoped to see you all at the Infantry Sports this afternoon and the tea at the Mess Room afterwards, but I fear it is useless to speak of it now you are in such trouble about the Egertons. You do not, of course, even care to think of such frivolities!"

For a moment even Mrs. Warburton was at a non-plus. Blood, it is true, is thicker than water, but the idea of losing such an opportunity for her beautiful Tilly and her entertaining Bella was not to be contemplated for a moment. At last her native wit came to her rescue and extricated her from her embarrassing position.

Mrs. Warburton drew a fine embroidered handkerchief from her pocket and wafted it gently across her eyes.

"Indeed, dear Mrs. McKerrel, you are most kind to give us your sympathy; it is only another proof of your good feeling; and if it would be any consolation to my poor cousin I would gladly abjure all gaieties and, so to speak, cover myself with sackcloth and ashes. But why should we cherish our grief? It is our duty to make the best of things in this life of pain and suffering! My dear cousin will never know it! And so, as you are so kind as to ask us, we will make an effort and come to you, my dear Mrs. McKerrel!"

One morning as Viola was passing the library, the Archdeacon came out, holding an open letter in his hand.

"There, my dear, you may read that if you like, and take it upstairs with you. It will be good medicine for Lady Mary."

The letter was from General B. He gave a tolerably favourable report of his young aide-de-camp's condition, but deplored that he would be quite unfit for active service for many months to come, and would therefore be invalided home as soon as he was sufficiently recovered to bear the journey. He was quite unable to write himself; the injury to his sword-arm had rendered it useless for the present. General B. went on to give a few particulars of the way in which Miles had received his wound, speaking warmly of his cool heroism, which had excited everyone's admiration: "The troops, retreating before the enemy, were crossing a river; Captain Egerton had himself nearly gained the shore, when, looking back, he saw a brother officer, a young fellow who had but lately joined, left wounded and alone upon the opposite bank, with the Zulus swarming down the hill upon him. Turning his horse, he went back, and dismounting, lifted his helpless comrade up before him, and struggled a second time through the river, amid a hail of weapons. A blow from an assegai disabled his sword-arm, a second struck him on the shoulder, making him reel in his saddle; but wounded and disabled, he struggled on until both he and his burden were safe among their comrades. Even then he would not suffer the surgeon to look to his wounds until his friend

had first been attended to." General B. added some warm praise of the young soldier, which deeply gratified his uncle. Then came the conclusion: "I intend recommending Captain Egerton for the Victoria Cross. Never was honour better deserved."

Viola read on in an April-like confusion of alternate tears and smiles. Then, clasping tight the precious letter, she hurried to Lady Mary's room.

The invalid lay in her usual listless state, propped up with pillows. Very wan and weary was the beautiful face upon which Viola gazed so tenderly. As she hung over her, Lady Mary roused herself with an effort, and opened her eyes.

"Dear Lady Mary, I have something to show you—a letter from South Africa—a letter about Miles!"

Her eyes were moist and glistening; surely no bad news could be announced by such an eager face? Lady Mary held out her hand for the letter, but soon returned it with a sigh as she sank back upon her pillows.

"You must read it to me, Viola."

It was not easy to obey the command. Viola's voice was unsteady, and once or twice threatened to fail her altogether, but the sight of those great hungering eyes hanging on her words helped her on to the end. Then she broke down and buried her face in the bed-clothes in uncontrollable weeping. Lady Mary caressed her tenderly, but she herself shed not a tear. A proud light had dawned in her eyes; a look which had long been a stranger there.

"I am not surprised!" she cried, exultingly. "My boy comes of a race of heroes; it is only what I should have expected of him. Ah, Viola! how proud we shall feel of our soldier when he comes back to us!"

The letter seemed to have restored spirit and energy to the drooping mother. The load of humiliation was lightened. She felt that she could lift her head once more among her fellows. There yet remained something to make life worth living. That same afternoon she expressed a wish to sit up for an hour or two, and although when the time came her strength did not prove equal to her reviving spirit, the very desire to make the effort was a hopeful sign, which re-assured them all. She had never been in immediate danger, but there was continued anxiety lest the prolonged illness should exhaust her enfeebled powers.

Once, on one of her bad days, she had summoned her brother-in-law to her bedside and laid her commands upon him on no account to send for her daughter Rose, even if she should become worse without hope of recovery.

"I could not bear it. Remember, whatever happens, I will not have her here to see the ruin she has wrought. Do you understand me, Archdeacon?"

"No, I don't understand you, Mary, and neither as a clergyman

nor as a brother will I promise obedience to your wishes," the Archdeacon burst out hotly, roused for once to rebellion. "You are in no danger at present, and, please heaven, you won't be. I hope you will live many years yet, and have time to change your mind. Our hearts are sore and bitter enough against Rose now, but some day, who knows? we may learn to forgive what we can never forget. I pray that day may come!"

He went without another word and never again during her illness did Lady Mary mention her daughter's name. A week or two after Rose's marriage a letter had arrived from her addressed to her mother. When Olive, inwardly trembling for the consequences, ventured to give it to her, Lady Mary glanced at the envelope, recognised the familiar writing, and without a moment's hesitation tore it into fragments, unread. The wound had gone too deep to be quickly healed, and for many months to come not even her nearest and dearest dared touch upon it ever so lightly. The merest passing allusion which recalled Rose to her mind was torture to Lady Mary's proud and sensitive nature. The pretty, graceful girl, who had been a favourite with everyone, seemed to have dropped out of their lives as though she had never existed. Captain Kane had fortunately been summoned to rejoin the head-quarters of his regiment in Ireland, so that Rose was at least spared the pain of a return to the neighbourhood of her old home and her former lover.

It was more than a year later, just as the Hussars were on the point of leaving for India, that at last Colonel Kane's repeated intercession prevailed with Lady Mary, and she consented to see her daughter, and bid her farewell. It was a trying visit for all concerned.

Rose came alone; so Lady Mary had stipulated. Miles (it was long after he had returned, and we are anticipating for a moment) received his sister in the hall with a grave kiss, and Miles's wife took her hand in a gentle clasp which would fain have expressed her pity. The Archdeacon was on the threshold of the drawing-room ready with a re-assuring welcome. Then leading her to where Lady Mary stood stately and majestic at the further end of the room, he went away and left the two together, that there might be no witnesses of that brief and painful interview. What could words avail to undo the past, or heal the wound which Rose's own hand had dealt to those who loved her best? Rose said little of herself, or her present life; if she were unhappy, she kept her own counsel and never betrayed it. After all, we do but reap as we have sown! Once when she would have said something of Wilfred, Lady Mary stopped her.

"Hush! Rose; I wish to hear nothing of your husband. He *is* your husband, and I say no more; but never mention his name to me. I cannot hear it with patience."

Rose began to cry softly. The estrangement was even worse than she had feared. Wilfred had not prepared her for so stern a reception when he advised her "to go and make it up with her

people." But Lady Mary kept severe guard over herself until the time for separation came. Then the long-repressed pain broke out.

"Oh, Rose! How could you! how could you!" she groaned, as for a moment she bowed her head over the golden one beside her. Rose clung to her mother in an agony as she begged her forgiveness.

Lady Mary raised her head and showed a face pale with emotion, which bore witness to the inward struggle. At last, with a long-drawn sigh, she stooped and kissed Rose's soft cheek gravely, sorrowfully.

"Rose, I must be merciful, as I hope for mercy, but though I *forgive*, no prayers can ever make me *forget;* no tears can ever wash out the memory of what has been. I pray, Rose, that no child of yours may ever cause you one tithe part of the pain, the shame, the misery your act has heaped on me and all who love you!"

(To be concluded.)

IN A GARDEN.

THERE's a garden of my childhood that I only see in dreams,
Ever sunshine lies upon it, shadows only passing flit:
Thro' the vista of my memory very fair that garden seems,
And I sometimes yearn with longing once again to enter it!

I can smell the lawn's first mowing, and the rich earth freshly turned,
When the Spring's warm-fingered touches woke to life the garden beds,
Where the double row of crocus like a golden pathway burned,
And the tulips in the border waved their stately crimson heads.

Where the south wall lured the swallows wheeling up against the blue;
Summer beauty gained upon us ere we knew the Spring begun:
There the pale wisteria clusters tender arms of fragrance threw
Till the white magnolia lifted cups of silver to the sun.

Year by year the blooming orchard lay like snow beneath the moon,
Year by year the chaffinch nested where the moss-grown boughs divide,
And her brood upon the branches twittered through the dawns of June,
Till the growing apples reddened under August's smile of pride.

Spring and ever-radiant Summer and full Autumn hold it fast,
My enchanted garden, whither fancy leads me back to-day,
Never Winter falls upon it, for the pictures of the past,
God be thanked, are happy pictures, and their skies for ever gay.

Only when across life's highway comes the scent of country briar,
Or of wafted honeysuckle, westward borne, and cold with dew;
Then the longing for my garden fills me with such strong desire,
That my soul is faint within me for the sunshine that I knew!

G. B. STUART.

THE BLUE CHAMBER AT ORMESCLIFFE.

TWO pretty women sat talking by firelight one autumn evening. A tea-table, splendid with old Crown Derby, and a satin cosy embroidered to match cocked on the top of the old silver teapot, stood between them, and the third volume of the last popular novel lay on the wolf-skin rug just where Lynette had dropped it, when even her bright eyes could read no longer.

She was a slim, fair-faced girl, with outlines a thought too sharp for prettiness, alert and sensitive to the finger-tips. Her keen, bright face took a dozen varying shades of expression while she spoke as many words; her hair waved crisply, her eyes were grey, dilating and deepening with the intensity of her meaning.

She was kneeling on the rug tormenting the big burning log in the grate with a toy brass poker, and watching the blue flames and red sparks come and go while she talked.

Her sister listened behind her peacock fan, calmly and reasonably, as was her wont.

"No marriage can ever be happy," declared Lynette, in her thin, musical, childish voice, "without perfect love and trust."

"I think I have heard something like that before," remarked Mrs. Featherstone, in her full contralto. "Besides, I never disputed the statement, did I?"

"Why, Lola! Didn't you say that a wife had a right to a man's present and future, but his past was his own?"

"Something of the kind," Lola admitted. "I also said that it was a queer way of displaying your perfect trust in a man to insist on knowing all his secrets."

"Trust me not at all, or all in all!" quoted Lynette, emphatically.

"And a nice position Merlin got into by acting on the advice," commented Lola.

Lynette shrugged her shoulders, and gave the log a furious blow, sending sparks in showers about. Lola meditatively stroked the soft plush of her tea-gown with her dimpled, white hand, glancing approvingly at the sparkle of the gems that encrusted it, and then spoke with authority from the depths of her basket chair.

"My dear child, it was a wise woman who said, 'Never insist on being your husband's first love; be content if you are sure of being his *last*.'"

"I would never set eyes on John again if I were not perfectly certain of being the one and the other!" Lynette replied, her colour rising, and her eyes darkening. "Our lives are to be one, with one opinion, one ideal, one set of tastes and feelings ——"

"Whose? Yours or his? And how about yachting?" interposed Mrs. Featherstone.

"Lola! When you *know* I have ordered three yachting suits for my trousseau—a blue, and a white, and a Galatea! Of course I shall try to go with him. I can but be wretched; but if *he's* pleased it's all right."

"You are a good little thing, Lynette," said her sister, affectionately; "but you see agreement on *every* point is physically impossible. I wish you would admit the principle in all things. It will save a world of disappointment and dispersed illusions."

Lynette's eyes grew dewy, and her lip quivered.

"Let me keep my illusions while I can, then. You and Mark may have your views of married happiness. John and I would rather come to grief in striving after a high ideal than sneak through life contented with having realised a low one."

Lola was silent. She had never consciously formed any ideal, and wouldn't have distressed herself by striving after it if she had, on any consideration. She had a beautiful, well-ordered home; a pretty little year-old baby son; a kind, considerate husband; and was the handsomest woman in the county. How *could* her life be possibly improved on?"

"I beg your pardon, Lola!" broke out Lynette, impulsively. "I didn't mean—that is, I didn't think—I oughtn't to have said so to you. What a blundering, egotistical wretch I am!"

Lola's great brown eyes opened wide in utter bewilderment; then, following Lynette's glance across the room, became enlightened and half-closed their curly fringed lids in perfect indifference. A half length portrait hung on the wall facing the fire. A portrait of a pretty woman, of a certain order of prettiness, the sort that curiously enough is never admitted by other women, however attractive men may find it. Ruddy brown hair, coiled high upon the head, after the fashion of some ten years ago, and rippling across a low white forehead; long eyes of a bright blue, with half-closed, heavy white eyelids; a small mouth, with full, red lips, and a soft round chin with a dimple like a baby's.

"Did you think I should be sensitive about Mark's first wife?" Lola asked, amusedly. "I had forgotten that she ever existed, for the moment."

Lynette frowned incredulously.

"I should hate the sight of her. Why do you keep that portrait there, Lola?"

"Because I am so much better looking, my dear—better in every way, and it serves to remind Mark of the fact. I like to keep her there in perpetual comparison with me—to her disadvantage." Lola sat upright and spoke quite animatedly—for her. "When Mark and I first came home here, he asked me to re-arrange everything as I wished, and I saw him glance at the portrait. I knew what he meant,

and said directly that I should prefer to leave Lady Mildred there. It would stop unkind tongues, I said, if that was still kept in the place of honour. Mark thought I was an angel, of course, and agreed. If I fancied he still loved her I would burn it this minute; but as he detests her memory as cordially as I can wish—keep your place, Lady Mildred!"

And Lola waved a salute that was half a menace to her pictured rival, and laughed a low, little laugh; then, sinking back with her usual lazy grace, demanded, "Some more tea; not quite so sweet, please, dear."

Lynette was quite accustomed to her sister's sudden outbursts—of passion, mirth, or devotion, as the case might be, and poured the tea out carefully, with her ears on the alert the while to distinguish and identify a confused sound of voices and horses' feet without. A ring at the bell—an opening door—a heavy foot, followed by a light one, on the stairs, and the portière raised and admitted big, burly Mark Featherstone, followed by a tall, dark, bright-eyed youth, John Langdon Orme.

Mark bent over his wife in her downy basket nest. Lynette sprang forward into the embrace of two rough, blue pilot cloth-coated arms, and pretty Lady Mildred looked down on them all from her canvas with her languishing blue eyes, a world of cynical meaning in the eternal simper of her painted lips.

Mr. and Mrs. Langdon-Orme were at home. The flag floating from the keep of Ormescliffe Castle proclaimed the fact to a gratified county. During John's long minority the place had been let to an unpopular, disreputable family, whose departure was viewed with much content, giving place, as they did, to a bright, genial young couple, with light hearts, and a pocketful of money to spend between them.

They soon hit on a very promising way of ridding themselves of a portion of their burden of riches. Ormescliffe Castle was a wonderful and imposing structure, once a stronghold of some importance; then a priory, and lastly the residence of a fine old English gentleman with a taste for classic architecture and Italian gardens.

There was a magnificent opening for artistic restoration, the only difficulty being where to begin. By way of a practical commencement, they had turned an eminent London architect (Murgatroyd, R.A., a recognised authority on mediæval art) loose in the great banqueting hall—a sort of apartment suited for a coronation or an agricultural show, hardly for the daily needs of an English gentleman's household.

"I'm afraid it will take all our lives and all our money before it can be finished," John admitted. "In fact Lynette thinks we had better stop and begin with the rooms we really want at once. Lynette is always so practical and prudent."

Lola was accustomed to being the recipient of similar remarks from one or the other of the devoted young couple, so she merely signified assent, and he set off again.

"She looked so handsome, too, last night, didn't she? Not a woman to compare with her. Old Lord Bilberry said so. The best dancer, and out-and-out the prettiest woman. I heard him—I beg your pardon, Lola, of course *you* were there; but you know Lynette is younger, and—and ——" John's sentence trailed off lamely; but Lola was no whit discomfited.

"Lord Bilberry is an old noodle, and as blind as you are, John. Lady Muriel Banks and I are both better looking than Lynette, and I was immeasurably the best dressed of the three. It would have been a want of proper feeling on your part to have noticed it, though."

John looked unconvinced. He went on:

"I came to ask you a great favour. I am obliged to go up to town to-day. A man has a schooner yacht to sell, and perhaps Lynette may like it better than the *Preciosa*. *Won't* you go to Ormescliffe, and keep her company? I wanted her to come here, but she wouldn't, and I can't bear to think of her all alone up there."

"Very well," agreed Mrs. Featherstone; "but when am I to go, and how long am I to stay?"

"I haven't told her, lest she should build upon it and be disappointed; but I mean to try and get back to dinner. Don't tell her so, for I might not manage it. If not, I'll come by the early train to-morrow."

Lola's eyes gleamed with lazy amusement.

"I'll take care to raise no false hopes," she said. "Must you go now? Good bye."

She watched him ride away down the long beech avenue, made some necessary arrangements for her day and night's absence from home, wrote a line to Mark, bidding him join her at Ormescliffe, and was dressing for her drive there, when she beheld a pair of pretty chestnut ponies trotting briskly up to the house, driven by a slight blue figure in rather reckless fashion. Two minutes later Lynette tripped in.

"Coming to me, were you? That's very kind of you; but John might have known his wish is law to me, and that of course *I* should come *here*, as he suggested it."

"Whatever you both like best," said Lola, serenely submitting, as usual, to be the shuttlecock of this impulsive young couple's arrangements.

"Well, as you are ready, come along, and I'll drive you," Lynette decided, and they started. Lynette had certainly improved with marriage; grown rounder and softer in outline, placider in manner and gentler in speech. But to-day there was a ruffled look on her face, and a sharp tone in her voice that made Lola look at her once or twice during the drive in mild interrogation.

Featherstonehope lay in a wooded valley, sunny and sheltered; Ormescliffe Castle on the hill above it, looking seaward. Beneath it lay St. Bride's Haven, with a tiny fleet of red-sailed fishing vessels dancing on the waters just outside, and Lynette's graceful rival, the *Preciosa* moored alongside a little rocky pier, from which a flight of rough steps climbed up the face of the cliff to the castle. One horn of the little bay was formed by a low headland, on which stood St. Bride's church, long ago disused, but containing the burying places of most of the old families around. The air blew fresh and keen as Lynette's ponies trotted up the ascent that curved round the hill, giving constantly-changing views of the mighty walls and towers above. Finally, it led direct to the obnoxious South Front, with its pillored portico and terrace. Lynette eyed the range of windows, all of a size and one-third blank, with their striped blinds, and the geraniums in the vases, that decorated the terrace balustrade with high disfavour.

"Isn't it hideously cockney? Think of having to live a day longer than one can help in a place like that! Only fit for kitchens and servants' rooms."

"You are very comfortably lodged there, I think," said Lola; "and I believe the Caringhams made the rooms look very handsome; but of course *we* never saw the place in their time."

"What *did* they do to be sent to Coventry by everyone?" Lynette asked, carelessly.

"*Everything*," replied Lola, emphatically. "The men were disreputable, but the women were worse, and Lady Mildred wanted to cultivate them! Fancy Mark's feelings. I'm glad he never gave in to her."

Lynette dropped the subject. Her thoughts were evidently preoccupied, and disagreeably so. Lola good-naturedly did her languid best to divert her, but in vain. She suggested a walk. Lynette was tired. That they should pay some calls after luncheon. Lynette didn't care to go without John. Finally, heroically subduing her own feelings, she expressed a desire to see how the restorations were going on. Lynette brightened for a moment.

"The Banqueting Hall will be done next week, as far as we mean to go. The pictures are home again, ready to go up, and we have *nearly* decided on the fire shovel. The designs for the poker and tongs came yesterday. So much depends on detail," Lynette sighed; "and John's idea was to get the fireplace complete first, as it is a feature and a necessary. Chairs and tables can wait—besides, I'm tired of it all!"

Lola raised her eyebrows slightly.

"I'm longing to get to our own part, where we are to live. Nearly everything is settled, and John and I were to have gone over the last few rooms to-day with Mr. Murgatroyd's pupil, Mr. Bell, who is down here, so that everything might be settled this week; and now this horrid yacht comes in the way and wastes two days!"

Lynette pushed her plate from her impatiently. "I offered to go over them myself, but John wouldn't hear of it; declared I must *not.* They are the rooms he had when he came home from college and the Caringhams left, and he says he won't let Mr. Bell overhaul the place without him."

"Never mind; let us see the great hall," said peace-making Lola; "John must have some good reason."

"He says the staircase is unsafe; but I don't believe it," Lynette answered, rebelliously. Lola declined further discussion, and followed her silently from the inhabited south front to the central part of the building, where a noise of hammering and sawing, of workmen's tramping feet and gruff voices, indicated the scene of the restorations. Lynette opened a door, and they found themselves in a great vaulted space, big enough for a cathedral, where the workmen looked like so many bees as they swarmed on high scaffoldings, toiled with their loads up and down tall ladders, or clung about the clustered capitals of the pillars. The fireplace, in which an ox might almost have been roasted whole, was indeed a feature, and seated in its cavernous depths, carefully copying a piece of old iron work, was a young man in a dusty velvet coat, with dishevelled hair. He rose and came forward as they entered.

"May I ask, has Mr. Orme decided about those rooms?"

"Not yet," answered Lynette, hesitatingly.

"I have just had a telegram from Mr. Murgatroyd. He hopes to get down here to-night, and I should have liked to be in readiness for him," said the young fellow, with a dissatisfied air.

"I will see what I can do," replied Lynette, hurriedly. "Do you mind coming back, Lola." Lola did not object. "Send Mrs. Wygram to me," Lynette said to a servant they passed on their way back to the pretty morning-room.

A sedate, motherly woman in black silk appeared.

"I want the keys of the North Tower, Mrs. Wygram."

"Yes, madam; I will bring them directly; all but the key of the Blue Room, as we used to call it. Mr. Orme keeps that himself."

"Ah, then, I can get it; I shall not want the rest."

The good woman looked disturbed.

"I do hope, madam, you will excuse me—but you won't think of going there yourself?"

"Why not?" asked Lynette, imperiously.

"Mr. Orme's orders were imperative that no one should attempt to go there. They aren't safe, indeed, madam."

"I shall do as I think fit," was all the reply vouchsafed to Mrs. Wygram, who withdrew, looking unutterable things.

"Don't be a goose, Lynette," began Lola — to empty air, for Lynette had fled. Up the stairs, through her own room to John's dressing-room ran the naughty girl. There stood John's mighty old-fashioned bureau, with its drawers and pigeon-holes and sliding

panels. Lynette had the keys of them all. Her courage cooled as she peeped and pried, first in one place and then in another, and she was just prepared to give up her disobedient project when she came upon the key. It was a big rusty affair, labelled and wrapped in one of John's silk handkerchiefs, with two smaller ones. She seized the bundle and ran, without giving herself time to think.

Back across the broad landing she sped, down a long dark corridor, through a locked door of an unused room, and so through a boarded opening into the dilapidated central pile. She was in a sort of gallery, giving glimpses of the sea through arched openings, ending in the spiral staircase of the North Tower.

She paused for a moment before ascending to look askance down the deep gloomy shaft which ended, she knew, in a door opening on the face of the cliff many feet below; then lightly ran up to a landing, from which one door opened. The key turned easily in the lock, and she flung open the door of a silent, mouldy-smelling chamber, lighted by a stream of dusty sunlight pouring in through an uncleaned lattice window.

There was not much for it to shine on. A tall and gaunt bedstead, stripped of hangings and bedding, an empty wardrobe with half-shut drawers, a toilet table, the glass dim with a veil of dust, and a green mass that once had been a candle-end in one of the sockets. That was all, except a print of John's college over the mantlepiece. Nothing alarming, and yet Lynette felt scared and uncomfortable. She made a pretence to herself of being busy, lifted daintily her pretty gown from contact with the floor, and paced the room carefully. "Fifteen feet; a very good length. We might make it to open on the North Corridor, I should think. Now for the width."

The room was panelled in a pinky grey, with brown mouldings. The panels were of all shapes and sizes, so she was hardly surprised, after pacing across from the door by which she had entered, to find herself in front of a second. The light streamed through its keyhole and caught her attention. She stood irresolute for a moment, and then tried one of the two remaining keys, a small steel one, that looked as if it might belong to a patent lock; the third key was a tiny gold or gilded toy. The door creaked stiffly and ominously, Lynette thought.

She might as well go on, however. It was only a large, light closet after all. Just big enough to hold a chair and a table, over which hung a portrait. Ah!

A portrait, evidently an enlarged and tinted photograph of a beautiful, smiling woman in a fantastic dress, looking straight at Lynette with bold, triumphant eyes; eyes that she knew too well, poor child: the eyes of Lady Mildred. She sat shivering and bewildered in the dusty velvet chair, looking at them in return with a face of piteous enquiry. The table underneath held a vase, and a large casket of gold and enamel of exquisite foreign workmanship.

Still looking into the cruel blue eyes of her rival, Lynette rose, and mechanically fitting the tiny gold key into the lock, turned it, and raised the lid. A strong, rich perfume still hung about the quilted satin lining; within were some few letters tied with a blue ribbon. Lynette touched them with aversion, and dropped them as her eyes caught some of the words, scrawled in an untidy, school-girl hand on the most gorgeous of note-paper. A long, soft lock of red-brown hair lay beneath them and a tiny velvet shoe.

She looked no farther, but, closing the lid with a bang, flung herself on the floor, crying angrily, miserably, hopelessly. The sun got round to her window, and passed it before she could check the storm of jealous despair that possessed her. She raised herself at last all tear-stained and soiled, and looked at her pretty slender hand with four cruel little wounds where she had bitten it to prevent herself shrieking or going into hysterics.

"What will John say?" she thought. "John? I can *never* see him again. I would *die* sooner."

She was not to be allowed the choice, however, and rose weary and spent with passion. Lady Mildred's cruel eyes followed her to the door. She locked it, and then the door of the bed-room, and slowly and painfully made her way down the dusky stairs. Her dress caught somehow, her foot slipped, and she fell heavily forward against the rotting banister. It cracked under her weight, gave way, and fell crashing down some thirty feet into the darkness, while she saved herself by a sudden jerk and grasp at a sounder part of the rail. She was not to be taken at her rash word, and sick and giddy she crept down the rest of the stairs. A splinter of wood had torn her hand, though she did not notice it, and the blood dropped on her gown and the handkerchief that held the keys when she stooped to pick it up. She sped on to the inhabited part of the house, hoping to gain her room unobserved.

"Lynette! Where are you?" she heard Lola calling. "Here is John coming home, Lynette!"

Lynette rushed to replace the keys in the bureau, then to her room, where she came full upon astonished Lola in search of her.

No wonder Lola opened her fine eyes. Lynette's pretty blue gown was smirched and blood-spotted, her hair dusty and dishevelled, her cheeks flushed and tear-streaked. But Lola had the gift of accepting a situation without needless comment, and when Lynette gasped, "John coming! Oh, help me!" instead of exclaiming or ringing for the maid, she tore off the soiled gown, and thrust it out of sight, poured out a basinfull of cold water with a dash of eau-de-cologne in it, and brushed and knotted up the fleece of light hair that fell over her sister's shoulders, then placed herself coolly at the window to report events.

"I made John out with a field-glass coming down the hill from the station," she said, "and Mark's dog-cart on the Featherstonhope

road. Yes; there's John just coming out of the shrubbery; he is taking the short cut."

Lynette finished bathing her face, and looked up wildly. "What can I do? What will he say?"

"You had better dress for dinner at once," said Lola, calmly. "Let me get your gown out. The black Spanish lace? Yes; while you do your hair properly. John is coming over the field now, and someone after him."

"Oh, who is it? and where is Mark? He *ought* to overtake John."

"I can't see. A flock of sheep on the road are raising such a cloud of dust. Ah! there is the dog-cart; John will be here first, though."

"Oh, look again, Lola, do! Is no one else coming?" said Lynette, clasping on her amber necklace in frantic haste.

"Yes; the other man, Mr. Murgatroyd. I know his buff overcoat. He will soon be up to John. Let me put your roses on for you. What an exquisite Marshal Niel!"

"There, there! Tell me where they are now."

"Just at the door, all together."

"Lynette! Lynette!" sounded through the hall in John's cheery tenor.

"Run down, dear, if you wish to meet him before Mark and Mr. Murgatroyd come in."

"But I don't!" cried Lynette, desperately.

There was a sound of many voices and greetings in the hall below, and Lynette swept down the staircase to meet her husband with the decorum made obligatory by the presence of others, while Lola, wondering greatly, departed to dress as the first dinner-bell was clanging noisily from the turret above.

She wondered more at dinner: Lynette sat between Mark and the eminent R.A., talking, laughing, and looking prettier than her sister had ever imagined possible. John was unusually silent, and once when the north rooms were mentioned shot a questioning glance at the sisters, unnoticed by his wife, and received with serene incomprehension by Mrs. Featherstone.

Lynette was silent and moody in the drawing-room alone with her sister.

"Lola," she asked, suddenly, "tell me about Lady Mildred. You promised you would once."

Lola looked perplexed.

"It's not an edifying story, dear. She married Mark for his money. She told him so afterwards, and made herself as uncomfortable a wife as a man could have: fast, extravagant, bad-tempered. She had a sort of way with her that men admired, and she gave out that Mark was very hard on her. I believe she flirted to the verge of impropriety, but *did* manage to stop there; at least, there never was any actual scandal against her, till she died."

"Then there *was* a story?" demanded Lynette, her face concealed by her fan.

"Only suppositious at most. Mark was in Paris when the old butler wrote to him to come back at once. He did so, and found her ill with what proved to be typhus fever. He nursed her, let no one go near her but the London nurse besides himself. She died a week after, quite unconscious. She said queer things in her delirium, and servants have ears and will talk; besides, the butler's letter was written *before* her illness was known. Her trunks were all packed, her maid did not know why; and a letter or two came to the house for her that Mark read and burned on the spot. He is very unforgiving, is Mark. He would not let her be buried with his people in Featherstone church, but at midnight she was carried out to the vault in St. Bride's, with no one but Mark to follow her."

Lynette looked gloomily across the bay to the headland, dark against the moonlit sea, where the ruined church still stood; a landmark for the fishermen. "Who was *he?*" she asked presently in a dry, cracked voice.

"Some young fellow with lots of money, younger than herself. I only know from chance gossip. No one ever heard the whole story."

"Good night, Lola," and Lynette sprang up hurriedly. "Ask them to excuse me. My head is aching miserably, and Mr. Murgatroyd will want to play billiards half the night." Lola kissed her fondly, and saw her depart with dire misgivings.

"I must speak to John before I sleep," Lynette was saying to herself. "He suspects something; I know his face so well. He has seen the keys. Oh, I must hear the full truth now, but it will kill me," she sobbed.

She had dismissed her maid, and, wrapped in her dressing-gown, sat trembling in the moon-light awaiting John's coming. She heard him stirring softly, she fancied, in his dressing-room, but he never came. Midnight came and passed. One clanged from the clock tower, then two. Lynette started from an uneasy doze. Her room was in darkness, the house sunk in tomb-like stillness. Where was John? She listened at his door, then entered softly. Silence and emptiness. No trace of him, except that from his window she could see across the great black mass of building a glimmering light. It shone from the blue chamber in the deserted north tower. She was too crushed and hopeless to weep again. She could only give a faint protesting little moan, and sink into her chair and sleep. Such sleep! More painful and wearying than hours of watching. Such dreams! playing with her great misery as with a toy, showing it to her now in one light, now in another; now as a jest, now as a dread, formless, over-shadowing horror. She was laughing, crying, dancing, dressing, going through scene after scene, fantastic or commonplace, but always alone. There was no John in the world; and

she woke with a bitter cry to find her head resting on his shoulder and his arm round her waist.

"Oh! John, my John, *what* do I care if you have had a hundred Lady Mildreds for your first loves, if you will but keep *me* your last!"

"Why, you are dreaming, my poor little darling," said John, laughing; "and no wonder! I thought you were in bed hours ago, when I listened at the door and found all still and dark."

Lynette roused herself to look at him by the grey light of the morning. He was in a rough yachting suit, his shoulders were dusty, and his hands smoked and grimy. "I've had a dirty job to do," he said, apologetically, "and it had to be finished to-night. I never thought I should be so long about it, though. I say, Lynette, I'm awfully hungry, and I don't know how to get any breakfast except by going down to the yacht for it."

"*Do*," cried Lynette, "and take me. I sha'n't sleep any more this morning."

John departed to "clean himself," while Lynette hurried into a blue serge dress, and was ready as soon as he was. They stole out of their rooms and down the corridor to the forbidden region. Lynette shuddered as they came upon the staircase with its broken rail. A rush of cold air and grey light came up from somewhere below, and the head of John's factotum, the steward of the *Preciosa*, was seen ascending to their level.

"I've brought the boat round, sir."

"Got the cord and weights?"

"Here, sir."

"All right. Wait here till I call you. Will you come with me for a minute or two, dear? The stair is quite safe close to the wall."

He helped her up, testing carefully each step with his own full weight before he let her venture on it.

"Did you know I had been here before, John?" she took courage to whisper.

"I guessed it; look here," and he opened his hand, showing the tiny gold key. "I found this, all messed with blood, where you had dropped it, and that told the story."

"Were you angry?"

"Angry? My darling! As if I had room in my heart for anything but thankfulness that you were saved to me," and he stopped to give her a mighty hug.

The Blue Room door stood open. A tremendous litter was on the hearth; blackened scraps of paper, pieces of broken glass, and a particularly evil smell was in the air. Lynette turned pale, and sat down on the first chair, and John cleared his throat, and seemed singularly wanting in his accustomed readiness of speech.

"You see, dear—I ought to tell you everything, you know. It's a nasty story — I didn't care to bother you with it before I

could help—but Murgatroyd coming, you see." Here John ran aground.

"About Lady Mildred?" suggested Lynette, in a hard, forced little voice.

"Exactly so," said John, floated off again. "I knew her, you see, when I was home for the holidays, and thought no end of her. She was so sweet, so gracious, so unhappy. Something between a queen and a saint in my very juvenile eyes. I made up lots of romances about her, till one day, when they all broke down. I was here a good deal. Spencer Caringham and I were school friends, and one Easter I found Ponsonby Caringham, the eldest son, at home—an awful scamp he was. Spencer told me no end of queer stories about his brother, and one day one about Lady Mildred, for which I gave the poor little beggar a licking there and then. That night, however, Ponsonby tried to get me to take a note to Featherstonehope, and then I saw it was all true, and went back to school disgusted, and believing all things against all women—except always my own little sweetheart. Then I heard of her death, and that she was to be buried like a pauper or a suicide! I don't know what put the romantic notion into my head that *I*, at least, would show her honour, and I got away unobserved, caught a night train, and arrived at St. Bride's church just in time to see Mark Featherstone leaving.

"The vault was already boarded up. I had brought a wreath of white flowers, so I just laid it at the closed door and was going, when I came full on Ponsonby Caringham looking like a ghost in the moonlight. He went on like a madman, raved, and tried to tear down the boarding of the vault, and at last flung himself on the grass before it, crying like a child. 'Did you bring that, Orme?' he asked, pointing to the wreath. 'You are a good little fellow. She always liked you.' I got away from him at last, and back without detection. Some time after I got a letter from Ponsonby, enclosing two keys. He was going abroad, into the Turkish service, and he left these rooms in my care, begging me to destroy his treasured relics when occasion required. And a tough job it has been," ended John, stretching himself. "A whole case filled with things under that table, and a portrait and letters. I burned and smashed all I could, and now I'm going to drown the rest before we go to the yacht. Hullo, Duncan!"

The grizzled head of the old sailor appeared in the doorway in answer to the call. "Just fasten up and weight that, will you," pointing to a canvas-covered bundle on the floor. "Now, Lynette."

They made their way in shy silence down the treacherous staircase to its lowest depth, where a door opened out on the face of the cliff. There was a path, and some rocky steps down to the harbour where the yacht's boat was in waiting. "Do you see that big rock

just under St. Bride's church?" John said. "They say there is a fathomless depth of water there."

John took the oars, and Lynette steered carefully out to the rocky headland. The cliffs rose black and grim, there was a great silence on the grey, cold sea, and she shivered as she took the oars while John lifted the heavy bundle and lowered it over the side as gently as he could. Down, down it went into the cold, dark water, with a sullen splash and a whirl of foam-bells; and the boat, after one great rock, shot out merrily from the chill shadow into the first rays of the level sun. Lynette's heart gave one great bound in accord. John's kind eyes were smiling on her, the last vestige of her folly at the bottom of the sea, the world all fresh and glowing in the warm beams of the new day's sun. Was there ever such a happy little woman since the first sun shone?

Lola looked from her window an hour or two later.

"Why, Mark! I might have spared you and myself a night's anxiety about those young people. Look over there. If they haven't been out boating before breakfast!——Oh, Mark, I wonder," sighed Lola, stirred for a moment out of her satisfied repose, "if you and I were as young, should we be as blissfully foolish as they are?"

"I don't know that we should," replied Mark, prosaically. "But they may think themselves lucky when they are as old as we are if they are half as happy!"

AD CUPIDINEM.

O Love, Love, Love! why come you again to me
With the glamour of olden days and the promise that may not be?
Leave me, I pray you, leave me, a waif on a sunless sea!

O Love, Love, Love! you have sweet, soft words and ways,
And ever a glory of summer around your pathway plays—
Leave me, I pray you, leave me to my drear November days!

O Love, Love, Love! I have given you all my heart,
And my thoughts are full of sorrow, and tears to my eyes will start—
Ah, take me not at my word, child!—I die if you depart!

J. H. D.

M. ELLEN STAPLES.

THE ARGOSY.

SEPTEMBER, 1883.

WINIFRED POWER.

CHAPTER XXV.

GERTRUDE'S FLIGHT.

THE inquest on Sir John Hatherley's death took place on the day but one after the event; it was held in the library of The Limes. Although naturally kept as private as circumstances would allow, there was plenty of excitement about it in public.

The first person to be examined was Lady Hatherley. She looked extremely pale, and presented herself with an air of defiance, which was due far less to courage than to secret fear. The reaction from her excitement of the day before had told upon her, and all her arrogance rose, reckless indeed, but ill-assured, to meet the obloquy which she knew she had invoked. Her imagination, perhaps, exaggerated a little the disapproval which looked out at her from every eye; nevertheless, there could be no doubt that even the scanty favour with which she had ever been regarded was seriously impaired.

The coroner, especially, was inclined to look upon her as a kind of Jezebel. He was a fussy, self-sufficient, very narrow-minded man, always burning to distinguish himself on these small occasions, which his intellect mistook for great ones. He had, from the first, disapproved of Lady Hatherley. With her sparkling beauty, her audacious grace, her foreign elegance and off-hand, haughty ways, Gertrude had always appeared to Mr. Lathom as "by no means adapted to Elmsleigh." He had come to the inquest with a preconceived idea: which was that mystery encompassed Sir John's death, and that it behoved himself to fathom it. All the gossip of the place had, of course, reached his ears, and he was deeply suspicious of Gertrude. In this he only shared the general feeling; for, to the excited public mind, every untoward circumstance in the case seemed, somehow, to involve her. She, alone, had sat up with Sir John; yet had been so careless a watcher that sleep overtook her. She had announced, or, as she averred, discovered his death so late that he had already

been dead several hours. She had had one brief moment of extreme agitation, so short-lived as to appear hardly natural. Then she had not only resumed quite her usual manner, but she had been guilty of the amazing callousness of walking in the public roads before her husband had been twenty-four hours a corpse. And, during that walk she had spoken with a person whom Elmsleigh was not slow to say she had gone out to meet. For only on the hypothesis of some special purpose was her walk explicable—excusable it could never be. And now it had oozed out, chiefly through the gossip of the Hatherley servants, that on the very afternoon of Sir John's death she had received the visit of a mysterious stranger who had refused to give his name, but whose description—tall, broad-shouldered, grey haired and bearded—exactly corresponded to that of the respectably-dressed man upon whom she had bestowed such lavish alms. Her munificence had been the chief subject of conversation at the Blue Dragon on the evening previous to the inquest; and, out of the various fragments of gossip, a sufficiently coherent and highly-interesting tale had been constructed.

Conceive the rush of all these thoughts upon Mr. Lathom's mind, and conceive, then, the awful air with which he looked upon Gertrude. Her simple tale of her husband's death by no means satisfied him. He questioned and cross-questioned her with wearisome iteration; asked how Sir John looked when she last saw him alive; how he looked when she found him dead; how he was lying; where his hand was; where the bottle was; whether she was a light sleeper or a sound one, and whether she had been lulled into her inopportune slumber by so marked an improvement in Sir John's appearance that her anxiety had been allayed.

"I should not have been anxious if he himself had not complained," answered Gertrude, rather doggedly. "When he ceased to complain I ceased to be anxious."

"You ceased to be anxious." Mr. Lathom repeated the words in an indescribable tone of official politeness, suavely settled his spectacles, and contemplated Gertrude with an expression which caused a great deal of general admiration, and made her quiver with rage and excitement.

"You went out for a walk the day before yesterday afternoon, between four and five o'clock. During that walk did you meet an acquaintance?"

"Not that I remember," answered Gertrude, carelessly.

"None? Not a person upon whom you bestowed money?"

"I don't call a beggar an acquaintance," she replied, scornfully. "And this particular beggar I had never seen before."

"On the afternoon of Wednesday—the day of Sir John's death—did you not receive a visit?"

"An old friend came to see me," Gertrude answered, calmly enough, but her countenance perceptibly changed.

"Have you any objection to telling his name?"

She hesitated a second; then said, "Ralph Mercer."

At the words, Mark, sitting a little apart, made a movement of surprise. He knew the name for that of a scapegrace cousin, whom he had never seen, but who was once to have married his father's sister.

"And were not Mr. Mercer and the person whom you met on Wednesday one and the same?"

"Certainly not."

This put Mr. Lathom out. He was not bound to believe Gertrude, of course; but a denial has its value if stuck to, and he thought her capable of sticking to anything.

"Is it not the case," he resumed, with some acidity, "that the person you met on Wednesday corresponds in height and general appearance to—ah—Mr. Mercer."

"I really don't know," retorted Gertrude. "The man I met on Wednesday was neither more nor less than a well-dressed beggar. Mr. Mercer is ——"

She stopped and let her intrepid glance travel slowly over her expectant audience. She knew she was about to disappoint them.

"Mr. Mercer is ——?" repeated the coroner, turning green.

"My uncle," said Gertrude, coolly.

Mr. Lathom was equal to the occasion. He rallied immediately, and asked if Lady Hatherley had introduced her uncle to her husband. Somewhat reluctantly she was forced to admit that she had not; so the coroner scored a point there. Next he elicited from her that her uncle was in rather shady circumstances; that she had always received him with some mystery; that she was in the habit of giving him money; and that she did not know his present address. This last fact was the most damaging of all, and, when Gertrude was dismissed, there was hardly anybody, but Mark, who believed her explanation of the stranger's identity. His own evidence, which was next taken, was so distinguished by quiet common-sense and honest purpose as to make very short work of Mr. Lathom's amateur detectiveship. But, unfortunately, he had very little to relate; and Mrs. Wilson, when summoned after him, had a great deal.

That admirable woman was indeed a fountain-head of suggestiveness. Hints and innuendoes seemed to flow from her in hidden rills, and gently permeate every look and tone of her answers. She managed to convey that there had been something inexplicable in Sir John's dismissal of her, and that it must have been due to an unseen influence—presumably his lady's. She declared that the patient had appeared to be fully convalescent on the afternoon immediately preceding his death; that the idea of sending for Dr. Hervey in the evening had, as far as the household knew, entirely originated with Lady Hatherley; that the doctor had not in her (the nurse's) hearing expressed any anxiety as to Sir John's condition, and had

distinctly, on the previous day, expressed his belief that he would recover. She stated that she had gone into the sick-room late on Wednesday night, when Dr. Hervey was present, that she had only stayed there a moment, but had failed to notice anything peculiar in Sir John's air; that Dr. Hervey had given her the chloral bottle to carry away, and that she had placed it and no other on the table in the sitting-room. She swore to this with tolerable positiveness, but did admit that she had placed the bottle down in the sick-room for a moment before definitively taking it away.

After saying all which, she was allowed to retire, having done Gertrude as much harm as she conveniently could.

Nor was the impression excited by her words in the least diminished by the evidence of Mrs. Hatherley. That lady declared that after the first alarm at her brother-in-law's seizure, which the doctor had pronounced slight, nobody in the household had felt any uneasiness as to Sir John's condition. She testified to Gertrude's refusal to let Mark share her watch. She swore to the doctor's strong prohibition of the second dose; of Sir John's desire to take it, and managed to make it evident how very strange under such circumstances it was that Lady Hatherley could so easily and soundly have fallen asleep. She related that she had found Lady Hatherley rifling her husband's bureau at midnight; how this event had been closely followed by the visit of the mysterious stranger, now declared to be an "uncle," but of whom nobody had heard and whom nobody had ever seen; and she wound up by narrating how in the very hour of the said stranger's visit Lady Hatherley had parted with her jewels.

Here, however, Mark, at his own request, was recalled and caused a certain revulsion of feeling by relating that Gertrude had offered the jewels to him and he had refused to accept them. But the slight disappointment caused by this commonplace explanation was very soon and very amply compensated for by Gertrude's own unexpected announcement that Mark had indeed returned the jewels to her, but that she had since despatched them to London to a friend to be sold! This statement, which took even Mark by surprise and considerably increased his suspicions, would have been simple enough under ordinary circumstances; but in the present case it not unnaturally looked very awkward, and tended considerably to strengthen Mrs. Hatherley's ingenious tale. And that lady, re-examined, presently managed to introduce a fresh element of suspicion against Gertrude into the business, by a very neat allusion to the affair of the missing Psalter—an affair which gossip had widely bruited—and to the extraordinary fact that Richard Dallas had never answered his sister's telegram.

Mark, indeed, though with some natural reluctance, stated his conviction that the Psalter had been secretly sold by his father, in common with many other objects of value; but he was powerless to explain Richard's silence; and Gertrude, who had not expected this

fact to be brought up against her and was furious at it, showed in consequence a great deal of agitation. To prejudiced eyes, this looked very much like the consciousness of guilt.

Florence, next called, related, with an odd mixture of shamefacedness and gratified spite, how she had "accidentally overheard" the mysterious stranger from Harwich insisting upon the necessity of his being supplied with money, and proposing that Gertrude should sell her jewels for the purpose; and she further distinguished herself by opportunely recollecting that the rifling of the bureau had taken place upon the very night on which Lady Hatherley had received a letter with the Harwich post-mark.

The last witness examined was Dr. Hervey, who had arrived a little late He confessed to having been taken by surprise by Sir John's death. He had certainly not thought Sir John in any immediate danger on the Wednesday night, although he had found him a little excited. He had deprecated the idea of the second dose of chloral because he had thought that it might do Sir John harm in his weakened condition, but he had not anticipated that even if taken, it would result in death. He was not prepared to say that the death had been caused by an overdose of chloral. The post-mortem examination had revealed congestion of the brain and a general enfeebled state of all the organs, which might account for the congestion having ended in death. In his opinion it had been the immediate cause of death. Certainly a condition of the brain similar to that shown would be caused by an extra quantity of chloral; but Dr. Hervey was by no means prepared to say that in Sir John's case, an overdose of anything had terminated his life.

In fact the good doctor's evidence had a vagueness which is distressing at all times to the official mind and was especially so to Mr. Lathom's. That gentleman, by eliciting an enormous amount of extraneous and sufficiently irrelevant evidence, had raised a very pretty coil; and now, like the magician who released the imp from the bottle, was rather at a loss what to do with it. He glanced portentously round upon the devoted jurymen and found them all looking as profound as himself. The room was warm, the hour advanced, and everybody expiring for tea or dinner. Mr. Lathom had a brilliant idea. The circumstances were mysterious; more evidence would be invaluable; he would adjourn the inquest. And he did so.

Everybody rose with an air of relief, except Mark, who looked extremely annoyed, and Gertrude, who turned as white as a sheet. The vague terror of two days before had again taken possession of her. Her fitful courage sank to its very lowest ebb, and her whole soul quaked with terror at the invisible toils which hatred and spying had drawn around her. The knowledge that, Mark excepted, she had not a friend in the house, pressed upon her exhausted nervous system with the ghastly weight of a nightmare. In truth, she was in a perfect panic, and sitting alone again in her own room, with her

head bowed upon her hands, she felt her alarm and agitation grow every moment greater.

Mark, meanwhile, in the now cleared library was relieving his feelings to Mr. Burton in a strain of very strong annoyance.

"That old fool Lathom! He is just an instance of the absurdity of a dog in office. What business had he to rake up all those facts which had no direct bearing on my father's death, and give the women an opportunity of venting their cherished spite?"

"I dare say Mrs. Hatherley thought it her duty to tell everything," slowly answered Mr. Burton, naturally anxious to excuse.

"Duty be hanged!" answered Mark roughly, for he was thoroughly out of temper. "Many crimes are committed in its name."

"I cannot think that Mrs. Hatherley, so quiet and—ah—gentle, would be influenced by undue malignancy."

"The mandrake is said to shriek when it is pulled up by the roots," retorted Mark, with a grim smile. "My aunt is quiet enough, as you say, but she thought the hour of her residence here had struck when my father married again, and she hated Lady Hatherley."

"Hate is a strong word, my dear fellow," said the clergyman. "I must confess that Lady Hatherley always struck me as something of an adventuress."

The dressing-bell put an end to the conversation. Half-an-hour later, Mark, his aunt and cousin, were assembled as usual in the darkened drawing-room waiting for Gertrude, to go in to dinner. She was often late, a cool unpunctuality being one of her defects; but on this occasion she was longer in appearing than usual, and their patience was exercised. Presently the butler presented himself.

"I beg your pardon, sir; but are you waiting for my lady?"

"Certainly," said Mark, looking up from his book.

"Her ladyship has not yet returned from her walk."

"Her walk?"

"Yes, sir. Her ladyship is gone out."

"I saw her go through the garden into the lane some time ago," interposed Flossie.

"Then, why could you not say so?" cried Mark.

"I was not asked," replied the girl, demurely.

With a smothered exclamation of annoyance, Mark rose. "It is useless to wait, then. I suppose Lady Hatherley does not feel inclined to take dinner."

That meal was finished: the evening wore on; but no Gertrude returned to The Limes.

At ten o'clock Mark rang the bell. "Is Lady Hatherley not yet come in?"

"No, sir."

"Call Seeley, if you please."

Seeley was Gertrude's maid, but she had no light whatever to throw upon the matter. Lady Hatherley must have slipped out almost un

observed shortly after the inquest; Seeley only discovered the fact when, on going as usual into her room to dress her lady, she had failed to find her. She had taken nothing with her, not even a travelling-bag.

"I think she has run away," suggested Mrs. Hatherley, with her habitual sleepy shrewdness.

"Then everybody will say she was frightened into it," exclaimed Flossie. But the next minute she was dissolved in tears, for Mark had turned upon her with most unusual anger, speaking curtly:

"If you cannot be just, you might learn to be generous. I confess I cannot understand how anybody can prefer a scandal involving family disgrace to the small sacrifice of one's personal spite."

CHAPTER XXVI.

FLOSSIE DISTINGUISHES HERSELF.

Mark went off to the station himself to make enquiries; but learnt nothing there. One or two people said that they had seen Lady Hatherley walking rapidly across the meadows in the opposite direction to the Elmsleigh Railway, and towards a certain point where three roads met. Two of these three roads led to other stations, for the whole neighbourhood was honeycombed with railways. One station was on the direct line to London; the other was off it, and also the farthest away. So Mark drove to the nearest, thinking it likely that Gertrude would choose both—London as her destination, and the shortest way of getting there. She was not very fond of walking; and the farthest station was a good pull from Elmsleigh. But at the second station, as at the first, nobody had seen Lady Hatherley; so Mark, although it was now midnight, perseveringly turned his horse towards the third. He might have saved himself the trouble. It was a little station of small importance and less traffic. The station master was unwell, and had gone home long before; and the official, left in charge to meet the last down-train did not know Gertrude by sight.

When Mark reached home again at two in the morning, he was met in the hall by Mrs. Hatherley and Flossie, and one or two servants.

"You had better all go to bed," said Mark. "Until to-morrow nothing more can be done. No, I have not heard of her."

There was a moment's stir and a whisper among the servants. Then Seeley came forward solemnly, a bonnet in her hand. "If you please, sir, the gardener's son has found this by the pool in the second meadow."

"Well?" questioned Mark, with a stare of utter ignorance.

"It is my lady's bonnet, sir; the one she always wore."

A thrill of excitement ran through the group, and Mark stepped backwards in surprise. Having been *doing* instead of *talking* for two hours, his imagination was necessarily tethered to the region of

facts ; consequently he was less disposed than anybody else present to believe in the likelihood of a tragedy. Nevertheless he looked a little startled ; and Flossie gave a stifled gasp.

"Lady Hatherley probably put on another bonnet," exclaimed Mark, after a pause.

"There is no other one missing, sir," said Seeley, "that I can remember."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, sir. You said so too, ma'am."

"I see that her other bonnets are in her room," replied Mrs. Hatherley, who was trembling violently.

"Call the men. Let the pool be searched. Take all the lanterns that can be found. I shall go myself," concluded Mark.

He stood under the lamp, gnawing his moustache, and staring gloomily in front of him, with an air of gravest concern. Once having admitted the bare possibility of Gertrude's suicide, the idea began to press upon him every moment with more force. She was so excitable. He had noticed her hunted look during the inquest. Her future had been rendered so uncertain by Sir John's bankruptcy. There were evidently motives and actions in her life to which she did not care to confess. Heaven only knew to what mad resolution of all her difficulties a moment's despair might have driven her!

A slight movement at his side, and turning, he saw Flossie, looking up at him with a white, scared face, and reddened eyes.

"Mark, do you think she has thrown herself into the pool?"

"I don't know, Flossie. Do you think that any fear of regrets it might excite here would hold her back from doing so?"

Florence again gave that same distressed gasp. Mark had not been very generous in his answer, perhaps ; but he was too much annoyed to be considerate. He looked at the writhing small figure with a cool, cruel directness.

"W—would it be my fault?" she continued, the whispered words sounding quite sibilant from fear.

"I think you would have your full share of responsibility in it."

She nearly shrieked. She was a superstitious little soul, and had been undergoing secret terrors for three nights past from the mere fact of being in the same house with a corpse. Her mind full of death and all its terrors, and her love of the sensational naturally very great, she had lent a most horrified ear to the suggestion of Gertrude's suicide, and what under other circumstances would have been mere morbid excitement in her, turned now to a craven remorse.

"Oh, Mark!" she wailed. "I did not think—I did not mean—you cannot say she was nice. I—I did not do anything ——"

"Only spy and listen, and carry tales, Flossie."

"Everything I said was true," she sobbed, distracted between resentment and fear.

"It does not follow that you were to say it," said Mark, determined

to give her a lesson. "Truly, Florence, if this awful thing has taken place, some part of the guilt of it will lie at your door."

Very loud grew her sobs now; she was absolutely wondering if Gertrude's ghost would haunt her. But before she could speak again, the men whom Mark had summoned appeared, carrying ropes and lanterns; and he started for the door. Flossie ran after him and seized him by the arm, "Let me go with you." She had a fascinated vision of the dark pool, as she had once seen it, with the moonlight shining on it, and breaking the shadows of the tall trees all around; and already in her mind she perceived, emerging from its ruthless depths, the drenched, slight form, and livid face and flowing dark hair of the enemy whom (as Mark said), she had helped to kill.

He removed her clinging hands gently enough, but said authoritatively, "No, Flossie; you must stop at home. The meadow is no place for you at this hour; and if we do—which heaven forbid—find anything, you will be scared out of your wits." She shrank away shuddering, and let him go.

But now, what was she to do with herself? Sleep she could not, and the whole house was most uncanny. Almost all the lights were out, and the moon shining through one or two windows of the upper corridors only made the gloom of the big hall seem more ghostly. She crept half-way down to the kitchen, but could see only darkness there; from the housekeeper's room indeed came certain discreet sounds of talking, for the maids were waiting there. But into that sanctum Flossie cared not to penetrate; so she wended her miserable way up again and peeped into the library. That almost did for her; for the window had been left unshuttered, and a tree waving outside filled the room with shadowy presences that might be—Sir John. And the tall bookcases, and quaintly-carved chairs; the table scattered with phantasmal-looking white papers, and an odd creaking which suddenly came over the furniture as Flossie put in her frightened head, made up an impression of such eerie force that she let the heavy door fly from her hand, and scuttered up the staircase in a perfect scare at the sound of its consequent thud. She next—glancing fearfully on every side of her the while—knocked at her mother's door, and when no answer came, turned the handle; but the door was locked. Mrs. Hatherley was not asleep and heard her, but she was entertaining an avenging fury on her own account, and did not want witnesses. She had been seized with a sudden savage feeling, that really was not unlike joy, at the thought of Gertrude's possible end. She hated Gertrude with a hatred that was quite out of proportion to any slight, real or fancied, which she had suffered at her hands. She could slander, but she could not strike; and the idea that her rival's proud and lovely head had, in any event, been brought low at last, simply transported the creole with a tigerish glee. She had fled upstairs, hugging the tragic secret of her satisfaction; and now in her room was living through such an hour of mingled feeling

as falls to few people within the quiet walls of a decorous and luxurious English home. The agony of suspense was exquisite, but Mrs. Hatherley knew that she must live through it alone: and that was why she would not open to Flossie.

The girl went to her own room, but everything frightened her; the tapping of the climber outside her window; the flicker of the candle on the walls; the reflection of her own face in the glass most of all. She could stand it no longer; and slipping on a dressing-gown, glided, shivering as she passed the room where Sir John's coffin was set black-draped by a moonlight window, to the head of the stairs, and there sat down—the dampest, most depressed, most wretched little being in Christendom: her one small gleam of comfort being the sounds of voices in the housekeeper's sanctum.

Presently one of the maids came thence, and, to Flossie's unspeakable joy began wending her way up stairs. It was Anne: a fresh, bonny damsel—far away the best-natured and nicest of all the pampered domestics of The Limes. But she gave a stifled shriek, and nearly dropped her candle on becoming aware of the small white figure crouching so forlornly on the topmost step.

"Miss Flossie! what a turn you gave me."

"Oh, Anne! it's only me," said poor Flossie. "I am so glad to see you. Are you going to bed, Anne?—Won't you stay with me for a little?" and here she began to sob hysterically, fairly worn out.

"Dear—deary me!" ejaculated the maid, and plumped down beside her in genuine sympathy. "Now, don't take on, Miss Flossie—don't, my dear. Why, what is it? Where's your mamma?"

"In b—bed and a—asleep. How she can sleep, I can't think. Oh, Anne! do you think she has drowned herself?"

"Drowned herself? Your ma?" shrieked Anne, in horror.

"No, no. *She.*"

"Oh, Lady Hatherley. Well, Miss Florence, I don't know. However, we shall soon hear."

But this consolatory suggestion only produced a fresh and more terrific outburst of sobs.

"Dear heart! Is that what you are crying about?" exclaimed Anne. "Of course, it would be dreadful.—But after all, Miss Florence, *you* could not have prevented it."

"But that's just what Mr. Mark says I might have done," returned Flossie, lifting a small flushed face, full of anguish dashed by fear.

Anne felt dumbfounded. But Flossie continuing to weep, and the night waxing chill, she began to think that there were pleasanter things than sitting on the stairs of a house with a coffin in it, and nothing to illuminate the scene on one's mind but one spluttering candle. So she rose and re-lighted the gas burner, and she stood looking at Flossie's crushed form, until mingled impatience and kind-heartedness suggested an idea to her.

"Perhaps Lady Hatherley only left her bonnet by the pool to frighten everybody?"

"*Anne!*" Flossie clasped her hand in excitement.

Pleased with the effect produced, Anne allowed her fancy to take a yet bolder flight. "And I dare say she's comfortably asleep at The Ship and Anchor."

"Let us go and see," exclaimed Flossie, wildly seizing on the hope as she sprang to her feet. What a triumph if she could bring back this news to Mark on his return from dragging the pool! The Ship and Anchor, be it mentioned, was an old-fashioned inn, as much a relic of Elmsleigh's past as the lane and the common; and it was about a mile from The Limes.

"At this hour!" expostulated Anne.

"By the time we get there, it will be light," said Flossie, pointing to the window.

"Well it *do* look as if that was the morning," admitted Anne. "But everyone at The Ship and Anchor will be sound asleep."

"Not the stable-boys," dissented Flossie "I once heard you say you thought they never went to bed."

As one of the stable-helpers happened to be an admirer of Anne's, this shot was most effective, and she made no further objection. Anything might be pardoned on this night of excitement. They put on their bonnets and started off, their spirits reviving considerably as they found themselves out of doors in the dewy coolness of the summer morning, with the light growing every moment, and all the birds awakening in the branches.

"Here they come," said Anne, suddenly stopping short, as they turned a corner, and pointing to a few men straggling home from the pool. "The others must be behind. They do not seem to have found anything."

"Oh! let us go on!" urged Flossie, with characteristic cowardice, shrinking from the bare idea now of meeting them; and very anxious, if Gertrude were not drowned, to discover her at The Ship and Anchor.

Arrived there, they found a boy already up. Anne blushingly elicited her acquaintance from his own particular regions; and questioned him. Blank disappointment! He had seen nothing of Lady Hatherley.

"Oh dear!" said Flossie. "They have enquired at all the stations, and nobody at all has seen her."

"And they have been to drag the pool," added Anne portentously.

Her admirer stood silent, his eyes growing big with awe. But a young man slouching about near by, came up and joined in the conversation. "Who's wanted?" he asked.

"Lady Hatherley."

"My!" said he, contemptuously. "I saw her take a ticket yesterday at Rosebank, for Brighton."

Just so long did Flossie stand to take in the full meaning of the words; then set off running homewards at the speed of a hare, Anne panting after her, as best she could. Along the roads, then up the avenue darted Flossie; sped into the house, and across the hall, and burst breathless into the dining-room, where the jaded Mark was refreshing himself with a cup of coffee.

"Flossie!"

"Oh, Mark! she is gone to Brighton. She is not drowned. I did not kill her. You were very unkind. She's a perfect horror ——" and thereupon Flossie went into hysterics.

When she had been brought to by dint of rubbing and cold water, and a little brandy, and was lying down in her room, looking very white and rather pretty, her mother sitting gloomily beside her; Mark knocked at the door and asked permission to enter.

He came forward and took her little hand kindly in his own. "I am sorry you had a sleepless night, and then that long walk, my dear," he said gently. "I spoke rather roughly to you last night, I am afraid."

"Oh, it doesn't matter," said Flossie, angelically.

"But it does, since I gave you such a scare," answered Mark, with his grave smile. "What I have come to say now is that if you have sometimes seemed to me not quite correct in your conduct towards Lady Hatherley, I think you have more than atoned for all mistakes by the impulse that took you this morning to the inn."

"Yes," said Flossie; demure, but assentient.

"And you must take care of yourself, and soon get quite well," added Mark—good fellow!—with inevitable awkwardness; and took himself out of the room.

The next day Sir John's funeral took place very quietly—more quietly than anybody in the days so far away in seeming, so near in fact, could have thought it possible for the master of The Limes to be buried. Nobody but the family was invited; but a few people went, partly out of respect for Mark, partly out of mere self-importance. All funerals are melancholy; but Mark sighed bitterly as he saw his father's coffin lowered, and reflected with a pang, how few regrets and how much less esteem he left behind him in the world for whose paltry prizes he had sacrificed self-respect and fair fame.

The absence of Gertrude of course excited infinite comment; and as it was known that she had taken flight, the neighbourhood had enough to talk about. Mark had telegraphed to Winifred, begging her to find out if Lady Hatherley were in Paris. To her family he did not telegraph for fear of alarming them; but he asked Winifred to discover, if possible, the cause of Richard Dallas's strange silence; and he concluded his long message by bidding her act in the matter as she thought wisest and best. It brought a slight gleam of comfort to the poor fellow in his loneliness and perplexity, to associate her with himself even in so small a way as that; but he told himself that

the pleasure was a dangerous one, for his whole future now was doubtful and dark.

"When is the inquest to be resumed?" asked Mr. Burton, who had called in on the afternoon of the funeral.

"Next week. I hope I shall have news of Lady Hatherley by then, if only to arrest the course of Lathom's imagination," said Mark.

Mr. Burton cleared his throat discreetly. He regarded the young man's belief in Gertrude as a kind of infatuation; and for his part was rather disposed to regard Lathom as a very sensible fellow.

"You have had no news?"

"None. Ah!" Mark put out his hand eagerly, for the butler had entered the room, bringing two telegrams. The first he opened was from Richard.

"I have been away. My sister's message just opened. Psalter sold by me by order of Sir John, under promise of secrecy."

That told Mark nothing of importance that he had not as good as known, but he passed it with a melancholy glance to Mr. Burton.

The other telegram was from Winifred: "No news here of Gertrude. Family greatly alarmed. Richard starts for London to-night."

CHAPTER XXVII.

GERTRUDE FINDS NEW FRIENDS.

Lady Hatherley had indeed taken a ticket for Brighton; but as soon as the train had carried her a few stations beyond Rosebank, she got out and got another ticket for London. The pretence of going to Brighton was a blind; and the dropping by the pool of the bonnet she usually wore, was another. Both devices were sufficiently transparent: but to Gertrude in her actual incapacity for judging coolly, they seemed of preternatural acuteness. And as a fair share of rage was mixed with her fright, she even derived some small satisfaction from the thought that Mark might (as he did) drag the pool for her.

She arrived in London just about the time that Mark had rung for the butler to enquire if she had returned; and calling a cab had herself driven to the dingy suburb where we have already once seen her. The maid recognised her; and after a moment's hesitation, ushered her into the little sitting-room where her mysterious friend, passing for Colonel Quince, but in reality Ralph Mercer, his body on one chair and his legs on another, was smoking by the light of a solitary candle.

"Gertrude!" he said, and rose in great astonishment.

"I am in a difficulty," said Gertrude, coldly: "and as it is principally your disreputable folly which has landed me in it, you must be good enough to help me out."

"My dear child ——"

"Listen to what I have to say," she interrupted, with scant ceremony; and proceeded to relate all the particulars of the past four days' events at The Limes. He listened attentively, with a growing expression of disapproval, and then answered dispassionately.

"You have dished yourself this time, and no mistake."

Gertrude's eyes flashed, and she retorted angrily. "Why did you ever send me there to plot and spy, and report secrets which I don't believe existed out of your imagination?"

"They existed and they exist; of that be sure. But it is like my usual luck that you should have failed to discover anything."

"Luck!" repeated Gertrude in scorn. "Why cannot you once for all cease from this disreputable way of living by your wits?"

"It has not been successful of late, certainly," he answered, candidly. "But you see, my too-impetuous niece, I have absolutely nothing else to live on. To become a respectable member of society and seek to live upon my means would carry me with the utmost promptitude to the workhouse. You look very contemptuous, but you should not be hard upon me, Gerty, for on the very first day when—after your first little escapade—chance threw you across my path at Turin, I recognised you for a kindred soul. You, too, live by your wits, and experience the vicissitudes inseparable from the profession. We are bound to one another by community of experiences and ties of blood. We will sink or swim together."

Gertrude rose, fairly exasperated. "If you have nothing else to say to me, I had better go away."

"Where?"

"I don't know," she said, turning hastily to the door; but for all her anger, her voice had a cadence of mournfulness. Perhaps Ralph Mercer felt it: at any rate he also rose and put his hand upon hers just as she stretched it towards the knob.

"Sit down. I am not much given to looking after people—but do you suppose I would let you run about the streets of London at this hour by yourself?"

"I may as well lose my time in that way as in any other."

He pushed her gently into a chair, and rang the bell. On the house-damsel appearing, he asked for the landlady; and she, a little sulky but curious, presently dawned upon the scene.

"Mrs. Marks," began Colonel Quince very politely; "this is my niece—ah—Miss Dallas."

Mrs. Marks stared a little incredulously at the beautiful and elegant figure before her: but she only answered, "Yes, sir."

"She has come up from the country to seek employment as a governess, and for the present will remain here."

Mrs. Marks made no answer, but it is likely that this modest account of Gertrude appealed to her sense of probabilities. At any rate her grim countenance relaxed somewhat.

"You have a room upstairs vacant, I know," continued Colonel

Quince; "and Gertrude, my child, have you a couple of sovereigns?"

Gertrude produced the money.

"I am happy to be able to pay my small arrears of rent, Mrs. Marks," said Ralph, promptly handing over one of the coins to the landlady. "And now will you get my niece some supper?"

The sight of the money had a magical effect, and Mrs. Marks vanished quite good-humouredly and briskly.

The next morning when Gertrude, after a sufficiently uncomfortable night, descended, she found her uncle very carefully and sprucely dressed, and with an air of great solemnity.

"I have thought of a place for you," he said. "Make haste to breakfast. It is already ten o'clock and we should lose no time."

"Have you *any* respectable acquaintances?" asked Gertrude.

"A few," replied Ralph, quite unmoved by the taunt. "A variety of employments has brought me into contact with a variety of people, and one or two of these have not yet found me out."

Gertrude's spirits were rising rapidly. A born Bohemian and blessed with all the elasticity of a Dallas, she found more charm in her present position than life at The Limes had ever afforded her. For though she loved luxury, she rebelled against respectability. And now, with her natural indolence, she was glad to throw upon him the whole burden of providing for her immediate future.

They took a cab and drove to a pretty house, set deep in a shady and charming garden in the umbrageous north-western suburb of London. A neat and noiseless little maid opened the door, and ushered them into a house where a conventual stillness seemed to reign. But Gertrude was quick to note the quiet comfort and elegance of everything in the little drawing-room. It was fragrant with the scent of flowers floating in through the open window from the garden, now adorned with the brief loveliness of the "leafy month of June."

The door opened presently, and a man, not old, but delicate-looking, prematurely bald and bowed, came softly in. His high-bred sensitive face struck Gertrude with a genuine admiration. Involuntarily she rose and—all her semi-histrionic instincts aroused—looked instantaneously respectful, interested, and interesting.

"Mr. Graham. My niece, Miss Dallas."

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Mercer," said Mr. Graham, after bowing courteously to Gertrude and offering her a seat. "I was afraid that you had forgotten the promise you made me on the day when you were so kind to my son at Brighton."

Gertrude could not refrain from a curious glance at her uncle. That kindness must have been marked indeed, she reflected, which could establish any tie of sympathy between these two men, so widely opposed, evidently, in habits and instincts and position.

"You are too kind even to remember the small service I rendered

you," answered Ralph, whose manner had become almost gentlemanly. "How is your son?"

"He has been better ever since that terrible attack of pain through which you helped me to nurse him," answered the father, with the peculiar melancholy, so resigned yet so pathetic, with which those who love him speak of a confirmed invalid. "I am sure he will be glad to see you. I have not yet found the companion that I seek for him. Ned, you know, is a little fanciful," added Mr. Graham with a smile as tender as a woman's.

"To be frank," said Ralph, "I thought of your wish in bringing you my niece."

Mr. Graham looked a little surprised. He glanced for the first time fully at Gertrude, and was probably struck with her beauty, for an expression half-doubting, half-pleased came into his eyes.

"Indeed—if Ned consented ——" he murmured. "But the life would be very dull for this young lady. We never see society; never read newspapers; rarely even go for drives. My only visitor is the doctor, and when Ned is suffering I am afraid that Miss Dallas would have nobody to talk to save Mrs. Wade, the housekeeper: an excellent woman, but not intellectual."

"My niece detests society," answered Ralph promptly. "And when one's circumstances change, as those of my niece have unfortunately done, one shrinks from scenes of gaiety."

"Yes, indeed," said Gertrude.

Mr. Graham sprang up briskly. "I will go and prepare Ned for a visit from you. And we will hear what he has to say."

Upon which the uncle and niece were left alone. Ralph turned towards Gertrude, and breathed the words "Worthy, but oppressive."

"Do you allude to Mr. Graham, or to your own unusual efforts to conciliate him?" she asked scornfully.

"To both, if you like, child. You are sarcastic, but I do not mind. If a tool is to serve my purpose I prefer its being sharp."

The colour flushed into Gertrude's cheeks. "You may be sure that I shall try to do my duty before everything," she said.

"I dare say you will —— at first," he replied placidly, and rage robbed her of power of retort.

In a few minutes Mr. Graham returned. He led the way into a room, the like of which Gertrude had never seen before. It had not the splendour, nor the vastness of the library at The Limes, but it was imbued with that subtle essence of culture, refinement, and true enthusiasm which Sir John's elaborately-constructed environment had always lacked. A small but lovely group in bronze faced the door; on a carved locker in one corner was set a splendid tripod in Indian enamel, blue as a peacock's plumage, of exquisite design, and raised on feet of fretted brass; and the rare spaces between the lofty book-cases were covered with old Florentine leather, stamped with gold on a pale azure ground, and more beautiful because more

delicate far than any of the famed embossed but barbaric work of Cordova. In a vast bow window stood a piano; near this in picturesque disorder were heaped a number of musical instruments, old and new, while piled upon a stand were volumes of music, bearing such half-forgotten names as Porpora and Scarlatti, and recalling, by their very titles, the gaudy splendour of foreign churches; the stately grace of minuets; the days of ceremonious bows and sparkling dialogues; of cocked-hats and shoe-buckles; of powder, paint, and patches.

The impression created instantaneously by the room was so various, so subtly compounded of many epochs and contrasted tastes; so fragrant of memories faint as the perfume of faded rose-leaves; that it was like a chamber haunted by the phantoms of a gracious past.

Gertrude stood rapt; then absolutely started when a slight stir at her side attracted her attention, and she found herself looking into the face of a youth so pale, so ethereal, so slight, with such spiritual-looking eyes, and such a cloud of shining hair, that but for the brand of mortal pain upon his brow, he might himself have seemed an apparition. He had slightly raised himself on one of the pillows propping him on every side, and was regarding her with an intent glance of very hidden meaning.

"My son," said Mr. Graham. "This is Miss Dallas, Ned; kind Mr. Mercer's niece."

Ned stretched out a slender hand, and as Gertrude took it and felt *how* wasted it was, how unlike a boy's, a thrill of the most genuine pity that she had ever felt went through her, and brought a world of womanly compassion and interest into her brilliant, but rarely-softened eyes. They remained thus for a moment looking at one another—the girl in her splendid strength, the boy feeble, tortured by pain, yet intense in his pure intellectuality. When Gertrude, with an unconscious sigh, turned away at last, a faint colour had risen into Ned's cheeks and *her* eyes were full of tears.

"You have not spoken to Mr. Mercer, my son."

Ned smiled very kindly and seemed quite glad to see Mr. Mercer. Yet to Gertrude's present mood, her uncle's voice and manner jarred as much as if some unskilful hand had drawn a bow along the strings of the priceless Cremona that, as she later learnt, was one of the lad's most prized possessions.

"You remember," resumed Mr. Graham, again addressing his son, "you remember that, now that you are better, I have thought of having some one in the house who would always be ready to read to you. Would you like Miss Dallas?"

Again Ned raised his inspired eyes. "I have not heard your voice. Will you speak to me?" he said.

"I should like very much to be with you always, and to do anything for you that you wished," said Gertrude simply, obeying him without a thought at the quaintness of his request.

"I am sure you are not naturally musical. You never *try* to play or sing, do you?" enquired the boy with perceptible anxiety.

"Never," said Gertrude, and this time she smiled.

A faint light broke the steady glory of Ned's glance, and he said: "I should like to have you very much."

"Then that is settled," exclaimed Mr. Graham, with unmistakable relief. "Can you come directly, Miss Dallas?"

"To-day, if you like."

"That is splendid. I shall expect you at six o'clock."

He convoyed them back into the drawing-room, briefly settled the business part of the question, and hurried them away.

"He wants to be at work on his dictionary," remarked Ralph when they found themselves in the quiet surburban road. "He is an Egyptologist. There is something Sphynx-like about the whole concern, isn't there? But you could not have got into a better berth, Gerty; especially under the circumstances. They never see a soul, and know nothing of what goes on in any other portion of the globe. A person pressingly 'wanted' would be safer there than in Sweden."

Gertrude winced. "Do you know that I have no clothes with me? And you took half my money last night. What have you done with that which you obtained by the sale of my jewels? You promised to keep only a share for yourself, in case I did as I have done, and left The Limes."

Ralph walked on in silence, looking a little red. "Really, Gerty, you have no delicacy," he presently said, in a tone of fastidiousness.

"Delicacy?" Gertrude burst out laughing. "I suppose that means that you have spent it all? Well we will say no more, then, about my share of the sale," she went on, good-naturedly enough. "But clothes I must have. Can you get me a few: on credit, or otherwise?"

"I will try," said Ralph, magnificently.

And in some inexplicable way known only to the race of Micawbers, Colonel Quince did manage within a few hours to provide her with a sufficient outfit to make a decent appearance in.

"Well, good-bye, Gerty," he said, when putting her into the cab. "You will do honour to my recommendation. Graham is quite a gentleman."

Gertrude wondered very much how her uncle had ever managed to become acquainted with Mr. Graham; but her curiosity was soon gratified. For during the tête-à-tête dinner between herself and her employer, the latter said: "I think my son is really improving in health, for you are the second stranger to whom he has taken kindly within the last month. The first was your uncle."

Gertrude tried not to look surprised.

"We made his acquaintance on the pier at Brighton. He amused Ned all the morning telling him stories about South America. And one night when the poor lad was moaning in pain, Mr. Mercer, who

slept in the next room in the hotel, heard him and came in. I confess I was alarmed at first when he appeared. Ned is peculiar. I thought he would object. But something in your uncle's voice (have you ever remarked how melodious it is?) pleased his sensitive ear. And Mr. Mercer sat by him all the night. I shall never forget it—never," wound up Mr. Graham, with serious feeling.

Gertrude made no answer. She was touched; but it was by the speaker's good faith. The little service had cost Ralph's facile nature nothing; and with what a wealth of gratitude was it rewarded!

Life in Mr. Graham's home was something like existence on an enchanted island. Wealth and taste gave it many elements of beauty; the domestic organisation, never hindered by interruptions, was perfect; the general effect was that of a dreamy, somewhat lotus-eating silence. Ned shrank with a morbid sensitiveness from visitors; and his father was only happy when poring for hours long over his books. He belonged to one or two learned societies, and occasionally went to a lecture or conversazione; but he never invited anybody to his house. Mr. Graham worked in a small room adjoining the library; and when Gertrude was reading to Ned, the door of communication remained closed. At other times it was open; and Mr. Graham never came in for a book or a paper that he did not address some remark to his son. Generally it was about his own work; some new inscription had been deciphered; some fresh excavation made; Sayce had written; and so on.

For the first few days after her arrival, Gertrude did not have much conversation with the lad. He seemed to like her, for he would lie, sometimes for an hour, contemplating her apparently in meditative enjoyment. She grew accustomed to it at last, and would go on working quietly. Probably that pleased him also, for he liked all things to be harmonious. Sometimes he would ask her a question about herself; once he told her that she had very pretty hair; and he was always greatly interested when she talked to him of Italy where, before the final sojourn in Paris, she had spent two years. Ned knew a great deal about Italy, especially its music. Marcello and Jomelli, Sacchini and Galuppi were names as familiar to him as to us Verdi and Wagner. His mind was stored with anecdotes of the life and looks and ways of these old perruqued musicians; and he had a picturesque, ghost-haunted kind of erudition that made things of the past a strangely-vivid, although fantastic, reality to him. His love of collecting musical instruments had its root far more in this dreamy imaginativeness that in any archæological passion. His little harpsichord, with its spindle legs, was dear to him for the figures in brocaded coats and lace ruffles that his fancy pictured sitting at it; and for the sonatas and the fugues, unheard by the ear of sense, that faintly sounded from it in the twilight which he loved. When he was a child he had begun to study the violin, he told Gertrude, but had been forced to give it up.

It was too fatiguing physically; and perhaps, too, the rapture of its pathos vibrated too strongly in his sensitive organisation. But he was never happier than when looking at his Cremona, once, tradition said, the property of Tartini; and perhaps, Ned liked to suggest, the very one on which the Fiend had played the unearthly and beautiful music heard by the master in his dream.

"The Prince of Darkness will never be so kind to me," said the lad, with that shining of his lustrous eyes, which was habitually his nearest approach to a smile. "And yet my life might appeal to him—don't you think so? It is so full of impotency and of pain."

"But you are better to-day?"

"Yes, this is one of my good days. This evening I dare say I shall be able to play a little."

"To play?"

"The piano. You did not know I could do it? I can sometimes, not often, and then come the long days of dungeon-life."

"Dungeon-life?" repeated Gertrude, wonderingly.

"Yes; my soul goes back into its bonds."

She did not ask him what he meant, for his manner did not challenge interrogation. He talked about himself in this quaint way sometimes, but it was done so placidly as to take from it all air of complaining; and Gertrude had tact enough to feel that he would not like to be consoled or openly pitied.

The evening of that day, as she descended the stairs into the hall, the sound of a march, steadily, although not strongly, played, struck her surprised ear. She pushed the door of the library open and softly entered.

It was the hour after sunset; and the only light in the room came from the deep glow of a fire made to ward off the chilliness of the rainy evening. Outside, the day was dying in a wan twilight. The branches of a tree, slowly swaying in the saturated wind, tapped against the window, and sent thrills of shadow through the room. At the piano sat Ned, dimly visible; no music was in front of him; he was playing from memory; or more probably from inspiration. The slow march full of a solemn melody filled the room. Gertrude as she listened to it, fancied that the boy was evoking in a phantom-procession the gracious spirits among whom his mind dwelt always. And yet there was a note of sorrow in the music—perhaps a wail of regret for stricken aspiration. Suddenly, with a minor chord, the playing ceased; Ned gave a sigh, and dropped his head upon his folded arms. Was he suffering? Gertrude did not know; she felt that she could not ask; and as noiselessly as she had come, did she glide away. In the hall, she met Mr. Graham. He was looking very grave and sad.

"You heard that?" he said. "It is a bad sign."

Gertrude looked enquiringly.

"He is always ill after he has played."

"But he has seemed so much better for two or three days past."

"It is no true betterness: only a kind of excitement, which exhales itself finally in music; and leaves nothing behind but the ashes of the fire that has fed it. Poor lad! Poor lad!"

The next day proved the truth of these sorrowful words. Young Graham was desperately ill; racked from head to feet with pain. Truly his soul had gone back into bondage—Ariel was imprisoned in the cloven pine. There was not much to do for him at first, except that which is the hardest task of all—to stay by and look on. But a new symptom, in the shape of extreme exhaustion, seized him, and then Mr. Graham sent for the doctor.

He came; a keen, quiet man, who looked somewhat surprised at Gertrude, but approved of her nursing.

"That beautiful young lady—is she a relative of yours?" he enquired later of Mr. Graham, with whom he was rather intimate.

"No, indeed; I never saw her until a fortnight ago. She is Ned's reader. He likes her very much."

"Humph!" said Dr. Kenyon.

Mr. Graham could not help being struck with his tone, and looked at him questioningly. Could he disapprove of Gertrude? Such an idea seemed preposterous.

Dr. Kenyon came for two or three days running; and each time Gertrude was conscious that he observed her. There was some interest and admiration in his glance; but there was more of a veiled curiosity, which annoyed her. She could not help responding at last with a flash of the eyes, in which all her old arrogance sprang again to life. A quiet smile curled Dr. Kenyon's lips; but he seemed otherwise quite unmoved, and Gertrude took to detesting him vehemently.

"He is a nice fellow," said Mr. Graham one day to her.

"I don't like him," she answered bluntly.

Mr. Graham smiled. "Kenyon is rather suspicious. Perhaps that is what you feel."

"What is there about me that he should be suspicious of?" she said hotly—too hotly. Mr. Graham glanced up at her; but made no answer. A mixed but vague impression does not conduce to reply; and it was such an impression that he had received in this moment.

The next day Dr. Kenyon, taking his leave of Mr. Graham in the hall, said: "Ned is so much better that I need not call to-morrow. I have left full instructions with Miss Dallas. She seems capable."

"Very capable and charming."

"More capable than charming, I should say."

Mr. Graham looked up. "You do not seem to hit it off together."

"Does she dislike me?" asked the doctor quickly.

"She has not said so."

"But she probably looks it. She interests me more than she attracts me. May I ask—have you known her long, and well?"

Mr. Graham related the circumstances of the acquaintance: winding up with, "And Ned likes her wonderfully."

Dr. Kenyon seemed about to say something special; but at this observation his expression changed. He hesitated for a moment, then took his leave.

The following morning Gertrude was in the garden, when she heard her name called, and turning saw Dr. Kenyon at the wicket. She went forward to open it, looking by no means cordial. "Edward is better," she said, coldly.

"I have not come to see Edward," was the answer. He closed the gate behind him with the air of a man taking possession, and walked forward on the path. "I came, in fact, to see you, Miss Dallas."

"*Me?*" Gertrude was profoundly astonished.

He put his hand into his pocket and produced a number of the *Times*. "Would you mind looking at the second column of the supplement?"

She took it with a changing colour; turned to the place indicated, and read an accurate description of herself, coupled with the offer of a reward for information that might lead to her discovery.

"Do you want to earn the money?" she asked composedly, as she returned the paper.

His face darkened a little at the sarcasm, but he replied quietly, "My coming to you is a sufficient answer."

"I should like to understand your object," said Gertrude.

He was silent for a little time, finding the challenge not easy to meet. He could not *tell* her that he thought she was probably an adventuress, and that his duty had seemed to impose upon him the necessity of warning that unsuspicious hermit, Mr. Graham, against her. He had grave doubts about her always, especially when away from her; but in her presence they were generally mixed with a reluctant admiration that neutralised their influence. He had looked at her so often and so narrowly that every turn of her graceful head, every change in the expression of her eyes, the pretty mole on her cheek, the little tendrils of curling hair were familiar to him, and—as he now with some alarm discovered—they brought him a great deal of pleasure.

"You are aware that Mr. Graham is my friend," he said, gravely. "If he were a man who mixed with the world, or took ordinary precautions to—to ensure himself against certain mistakes, neither I nor anybody else would have the right to interfere in his affairs. But as it is ——"

"But as it is you think you should play policeman for him?" interrupted Gertrude, with an ironical smile.

"I confess that if you are here under false pretences, I should regard it as my duty to warn him," was the steady reply.

"I came here to read to Edward; to nurse him when suffering; to amuse him when better; to lighten and soothe, as much as may be,

a lot which is among the hardest on earth. These were my 'pretences' in presenting myself. Can you show them to have been false?" she asked, bitterly.

"You have done all that could have been asked from you —— and more," he replied, and his tone had grown earnest.

"Then why do you seek to drive me from a refuge when my life is blameless; where I find happiness and peace?" she asked impetuously, turning to him with kindling eyes.

Swiftly, before she could guess his purpose, he took her hand She tried to release it; then feeling all the power of the strong and quiet grasp, stayed her struggling, but stood away from him, silent, rigid, and defiant.

"I do not wish to drive you away," he said gently; "far less do I seek to know your secrets. All I would like you to do is to go to Mr. Graham and state your position to him, whatever it may be, frankly and clearly."

"I have done nothing to be ashamed of," cried Gertrude: then repented of the words before they had fairly left her lips. Where was her pride that she should seek to justify herself to him?

"That is all the more reason why you should confide in Mr. Graham."

"I will not; no, I will not," exclaimed Gertrude; in reality filled once more with the vague, over-wrought terror that had driven her from The Limes. Why were they advertising for her? Who was it wanted her? Had the inquest been resumed? Were fresh facts turning into false witnesses against her? The fatal love of mystery, that dodged her natural astuteness always and blighted it like a baleful shadow, again rose supreme within her. She would disclose nothing; place herself in no man's power; she would go away once more—anywhere; anywhere—but not to Ralph Mercer. And as she came to this determination, she put her head back haughtily with a movement habitual to her, and plunged her glance into Dr. Kenyon's steady grey eyes that had never quitted her face.

"What do you mean to do, Miss Dallas?"

"Something that will gratify you," answered Gertrude, angrily. "Will you please to let go my hand?"

He dropped it abruptly, raised his hat, bowed, and without a word further—left her.

(To be continued.)

WHERE SHALL I SPEND MY HOLIDAYS?

THE above question is most important to any woman who has to maintain herself by her own exertions; so many things must be considered. Expense is a great object to a working woman, and as a holiday is necessary to health, it is needful to be careful in selecting a health-giving air; and as solitude is not good for either health or spirits, she has also to look for congenial companionship.

Now let me tell you of a sea-side *home* which combines all these necessaries: where I spent a most delightful holiday last year, and where I am enjoying myself equally this year.

A friend who had passed a fortnight there told me of "The House of Rest for Women in Business," at Babbicombe, South Devon. She gave so glowing an account of it, and I had longed, so vainly, all my life to see Devonshire, that I wrote, as directed, to Miss Skinner. I received a most kind reply promising me a welcome; and early one morning started from a dull Northern town upon my long journey to the sunny South.

According to instructions I alighted at Torre Station. There I found some small omnibuses, and one of them conveyed me and my luggage to Babbicombe. An up-hill ride of half-an-hour brought me to my destination. The omnibus stopped at a pretty, semi-detached villa of moderate size, standing back from the road, a short carriage drive leading to the entrance. With rather a quaking heart I approached the door, wondering whom or what I should meet first. In the vestibule a lady, who was, I found, the matron, greeted me very cordially—a great relief to a tired traveller—and by her I was taken upstairs to a room, in which were two beds, white dimity curtains dividing the chamber in half, so that each occupant was quite in private. Each part was provided with an ottoman, one chair, a wash-hand-stand, with a looking-glass and towel-rail above and a cupboard beneath.

Here I left my belongings, and went down the broad staircase to the dining-room, where I had some supper and chatted for a few minutes with the matron. Ever since I came into the house I had heard merry voices and laughter proceeding from the room opposite the dining-room: the occupants were evidently enjoying some good game. The dining-room was long and large, furnished with a couch, two long tables placed T fashion, and comfortable chairs; the walls were delicately coloured in shades of green. From the two windows I often afterwards caught delightful glimpses of the sea. As I was fatigued, the matron excused me from joining the household that night; and so I took my lamp and was very glad to go to rest.

The next morning at 7.30 a bell rang for dressing, and at 7.55 a second summons brought the "visitors" (as the inmates are called)

from every room. I followed the stream into the drawing-room, where prayers were read by the matron. These were very appropriate, some being specially composed for the house. A little book containing the short service was handed to each person present. After prayers I had leisure to examine the room, and was charmed with its home-like comfort and graceful elegance. The ladies who founded and furnished this delightful *home* did not stop at comfort and necessaries. The eye rests with pleasure upon the delicately-tinted ceiling and walls, the latter hung with choice pictures, a gift from Bishop Fraser, of Manchester; the floor was carpeted with warm crimson floor cloth, easy-chairs were scattered about, and three inviting couches. The two long windows, which open upon a terrace, and overlook a pretty garden and lawn, held a stand of ferns in one, a low seat in the other. Flowers in pretty vases stood about on the large writing-table and upon the mantelpieces at either end of the long double room; a large book-case, well stocked with interesting books, filled a recess, and was free to all. This completes, imperfectly, my first impression, and a closer acquaintance with its numerous comforts only increased my admiration. A piano has now been added, which is a great acquisition.

So much for the room; now for the occupants. These were women, twenty perhaps, varying in age from seventeen to sixty, as far as I could judge. Some looked ill, and had evidently availed themselves of a pleasant home and beautiful air to recruit exhausted energies. Most of these, I am glad to say, seemed quite restored before they said "good-bye." The rest all appeared very happy and full of enjoyment; they greeted me kindly, and assured me I should soon feel at home, as in truth I did. At breakfast, merry talk abounded, and as I was a stranger I had time to survey my neighbours. The breakfast-service was very pretty, of delicate blue and white; I afterwards heard it was a present to the house. After a substantial meal, the rest adjourned, whilst I remained with the matron, who entered my name and address, occupation, and religion, and I then made my first week's payment. When this was done, as I found the others engaged in making their beds, I followed their example, and also arranged my things in the spaces allotted to them. It was a wet morning, and as out-door exercise was impossible, I started on a tour of inspection, and found that, on the same floor with my own bed-room, were four others, named respectively, from the colours of the walls, the Pink, Blue, Green, and Peacock rooms, and a tiny one over the entrance called the Nest. With the exception of this last and my own (the Peacock), they were all very large, each being divided by white curtains into three or four separate compartments, furnished like my own.

After dinner the rain ceased, and I accompanied four of the other visitors in a walk, and saw a little of the beauty of Devonshire. I feel that I am not capable of describing its wonderful scenery: but

the remembrance of it is a perpetual delight, and I often pass a pleasant hour in looking over the photographic views I brought home, and in recalling my visits to each lovely spot.

The House of Rest stands at the end of Babbicombe Downs. A long zigzag path, which takes quite a quarter of an hour to descend, leads to Oddicombe Beach, from which, and also from Babbicombe Beach, parties of "visitors" embark for rowing. Here also are bathing machines, which, on fine days, are in great request. Another recreation is found in driving to the neighbouring places of interest, which seem endless.

Amongst so many fellow-visitors it could hardly be expected that all would be companionable, but I was agreeably surprised to find that all were friendly: everyone seemed eager to make new-comers happy and at home.

The ladies who originated the idea of establishing this home (the Misses Skinner) reside quite near, take great interest in the welfare of each inmate, and visit the house daily. Miss Skinner has written a little pamphlet, which gives a far better description than I can attempt, and can be obtained on application to the matron.

The House has been open for four or five years only, and twice during that time larger premises have been needed and taken. Even now bed-rooms have to be hired in the village. Twenty-eight inmates can be accommodated in the House. The work and trouble to these ladies is very great; answering the letters alone must be irksome. They conduct all the correspondence themselves, which not only saves the expense of a secretary, but also makes them feel better acquainted with each visitor by personal correspondence.

Visitors are received at 12*s.* a-week without, or 5*s.* a-week with, a subscriber's ticket. Subscribers of £1 yearly are entitled to one ticket to give to any woman who cannot afford to pay the 12*s.* Any person wishing to subscribe to this excellent work can do so, or can send donations of money, books, furniture, or indeed anything likely to be useful where so much is needed.

Every communication should be sent to Miss Skinner, at her private address, Bayfield, Babbicombe, South Devon.

The food supplied to visitors is plain, but good in quality and unlimited in quantity; milk is given with supper, no ale or other alcoholic drinks being permitted. In the evening games of various kinds are in vogue; charades, draughts, proverbs, &c., &c.; thus not one minute in the day is dull; my only complaint was that the days were too short and too few.

If only this rambling attempt at description makes known to some of my fellow-women—especially those from the north, where it is not so well-known as in London—this well-named "House of *Rest*," I shall feel that I have done something to show my appreciation of the pleasure and benefit I derived from my visits, and of the kindness of the ladies who labour so devotedly for their poorer sisters.

One great advantage is that this is equally suitable as a winter and summer resort.

I have omitted to say that the visitors are composed chiefly of teachers of elementary schools, post-office clerks, and girls employed in shops, warehouses, &c. The visit is not limited to a special period; but, upon application for admission, intending visitors are requested to state, if possible, the length of time they wish to remain, in order to prevent disappointment. The beds are often bespoken weeks in advance, and as one visitor leaves in the morning, another fills her place at night. Some visitors remain only a week, others a fortnight, many a month; and some have stayed the entire winter, and then left reluctantly.

The railway fare from London or Bristol to Torre is reduced to one half by application to the Rev. John Hewett, vicar of Babbicombe; and the return ticket is available for one month: this considerably lessens the expenses of the journey.

LOVE'S BANISHMENT.

"Oh, Tyrant Love," I said, "I need thee not;
I will not waste my hours in fruitless woe,
In sighing for the sunshine of thy smiles—
So thou, oh Love, must go.

"The world," I said, "is fair without thee, Love;
Let others own thee master—I am free.
Thy throne remaineth empty in my heart;
I have no need of thee."

But the sun fell and all the sky grew dark,
The flowers faded and the songbirds slept,
And on the border of a desert plain,
I, weary, lay and wept.

Then numbers passed me, singing on their way
Towards a fair city on the heights afar;
Who answered, when I questioned of their light:
"Love is our guiding star!"

And one drew near from out that joyous throng
Beseeching me to call love back again:
"Love will repay thee," so he whispered low,
"For all thine hours of pain:

"Love will remove the many stones and briars
That line the pathways where thy feet must roam——'

So I was fain to open wide my heart,
And pray "Oh Love, come home!" M. E. F.

THE TENANT OF THE CEDARS.

By Mary E. Penn.

"TO be let, furnished, by the month or year, The Cedars, a pretty rustic cottage, delightfully situated in Ranstone Park, Berkshire, with right of fishing in the trout stream. For particulars, apply to Mr. Newton, House Agent, Reading."

This advertisement arrested my attention as I, Percival Wilford, barrister-at-law, glanced over the columns of the *Times* one August morning, ten or twelve years ago.

It seemed like an answer to the question I had been deliberating as I sat at breakfast in my dull Temple chambers—namely, where should I spend the Long Vacation? I had reached that sedate period of life when one begins to realise that "there is no joy but calm," and my ideal of a holiday retreat was some quiet, leafy nook where I could read and dream, and "go a-fishing," and forget for a time that such things as briefs existed. I may add that I had only my own tastes to consult in the matter, having the misfortune (to which I am perfectly resigned) to be a bachelor. I made a note of the advertisement, and resolved to run down to the place next day and see whether it answered to its attractive description.

Accordingly, on the following afternoon I took train to Reading, and walked thence to the village of Ranstone, which consisted of one long, up-hill street, beginning with a blacksmith's forge and ending with a barn. Midway between them stood an inn: The Golden Sheaf. Feeling somewhat fatigued by a five-mile walk along dusty country roads, I turned into this hostelry to refresh myself with a glass of ale, and enquire my way. The landlord, a red-faced burly man, in shirt-sleeves and a white apron, seemed puzzled by my question.

"The Cedars!" he repeated; "oh—I understand, sir. You mean the little thatched house in the park. We call it 'Ranstone's Folly.'"

"Why 'Folly?'" I queried.

"Well, sir, because it's a fanciful sort of place, and was built for a whim. Sir Richard Ranstone, the father of the present baronet, designed it himself when a young man, and used to shut himself up there to scribble poetry. Since his death it has been let from time to time, but not often. Such a lonesome, out-of-the-way place don't suit everyone."

"I fancy it will just suit me," I remarked.

My host scanned me curiously as he set down the glass at my elbow. "Perhaps you're in the poetical line yourself, sir?" he suggested.

I laughed, and assured him that my "line" was nothing half so agreeable; and when I had finished, paid for my modest refreshment, and set off hopefully on my way.

It led through the village and along the high road, and in about ten minutes I came to the ivy-covered park wall, which was pleasantly shaded by trees.

Presently I found myself opposite the lodge-gates, my summons at which was answered by a neat, comely woman of middle-age, to whom I explained my errand, and exhibited my credentials in the shape of the house-agent's card.

"The cottage is right on the other side of the park, sir, close to the stream," she said, as she admitted me. "I'm sorry I can't show you the way, but Foster's out, and I've no one to leave. However, you can't miss it if you keep to that path," pointing to one which branched off to the right of the main avenue. "There's a man living in charge who will show you over the house."

"Has it been long unlet?" I enquired.

"Nigh upon three years. The last tenant only lived there six months—a lady named Lestelle."

"That is a French name?"

"Yes, sir, she was French, and had been a singer, I believe."

"Lestelle," I repeated thoughtfully; "was it Léonie Lestelle, I wonder, who took the town by storm a few seasons ago? But that is hardly probable."

"What was she like, sir?" my companion enquired, looking interested. "Young and pretty?"

"More than pretty. She had one of the loveliest faces I ever saw, and a voice that matched it."

"It must be the same," Mrs. Foster exclaimed; "that's just her description. A beautiful young lady she was, and so gentle and sweet-spoken it was a pleasure to serve her."

"But what brought her to The Cedars?" I questioned. "When she disappeared from London society about four years ago, it was supposed that she had returned to France. Was she living alone?"

"Quite alone, except for the servants—an elderly woman who did the housework, and a man named Underwood who attended to the garden and went of errands. It's him that's been living in charge of the house for the last two years. He used to be one of the under-gardeners at the Hall, but was dismissed because he was always quarrelling with the other men. A sullen, ill-conditioned fellow he is—though I ought not to say so, perhaps, as he's a cripple and deformed," she added, with compunction. "He has a hard life of it."

"How came Mademoiselle Lestelle to take him into her service?"

"It was out of kindness, sir, because no one else would employ him. Her patience and sweetness conquered even him. I believe he worshipped the ground she trod upon, and he was like one frantic when she was—when she died."

I started. "What—is she dead?" I asked.

My companion looked at me in surprise. "Didn't you know, sir? Did you never hear?"

"I have heard nothing of her since she gave up her profession. What was the cause of her death?"

Before she could reply the sound of a horse approaching rapidly up the road made her glance towards the gates. "It's Sir Philip," she said, hurriedly, and ran forward to open them.

The baronet was a tall, distinguished-looking man, of two or three and thirty, with handsome, haughty features, bold dark eyes, and full red lips half hidden by a sweeping moustache. A striking face, but scarcely an attractive one. There was something at once hard and sensual about it that repelled me. He was mounted on a handsome chestnut mare, whose panting, foam-flecked sides showed that she had been mercilessly ridden. Apparently the exercise had not improved her owner's temper. Slight as was the delay in admitting him, he abused the woman for keeping him waiting. He was riding on when, perceiving me, he drew rein.

"The gentleman has called to see the cottage," Mrs. Foster explained.

"What cottage?" he asked, absently.

"The Cedars, Sir Philip."

He slightly nodded, and acknowledging my salute by touching the brim of his hat with his whip, jerked the bridle, and rode on up the avenue, followed by his dogs. Mrs. Foster looked after her master's retreating figure with no great favour.

"He needn't have sworn at me," she muttered, resentfully. "I was as quick as I could be. But he's in one of his moods to-day, and makes everyone suffer for it. Ah—I wouldn't be in my lady's shoes for all her grandeur. They've only been married a couple of years, but already ——"

A significant shake of the head finished the sentence.

"Who was Lady Ranstone?" I asked.

"She was the daughter and heiress of Mr. Goldney, the great banker. She's a nice lady, but no beauty, and several years older than Sir Philip. It's pretty well known that he married her for her money, being over head and ears in debt, thanks to his ——. But I really beg your pardon, sir," she broke off, becoming suddenly conscious of her indiscretion. "I ought not to detain you with my gossip. If Underwood is not indoors, you'll find him somewhere in the garden—reading, most likely. He's quite a scholar, in his way. Good afternoon, sir, and a pleasant walk."

I nodded to her, and went my way down the path she had indicated, which traversed the whole width of the park; winding across sunny glades, and ferny hollows, and under the shade of "immemorial elms," between whose branches I caught glimpses of the Hall, a stately modern building in the Italian style.

At length, emerging from a young oak plantation, I came unexpectedly upon the stream—which at this point was both broad and deep—and on the slope of the opposite bank stood The Cedars.

It was a picturesque rustic pavilion, with a high, thatched roof, whose overhanging ledge, supported on pillars, formed a verandah, on to which the lower windows opened. Behind it the trees clustered closely, and the garden in front sloped to the edge of the stream, which was spanned by a light rustic bridge. I crossed it, and passed through a wicket gate into the garden, which was in beautiful order; the parterres a mass of brilliant bloom, the grass-plot like green velvet.

It was not till I was close to the house that I perceived the figure of the custodian, who was seated in the verandah.

He was a man of from thirty-five to forty, with rugged strongly-marked features, and melancholy dark eyes. His figure, though mis-shapen, was vigorous and muscular, and there was a look of suppressed power about him which suggested hidden reserves of force, both mental and physical. I had ample time to make these observations, for he did not seem to notice my approach, nor did he reply when I addressed him.

There was a book in his hand, a well-worn volume of Shakespeare, but he was not reading. He sat in a listening attitude, with head upraised and lips apart, his foot gently beating the ground, as if in time to music. Involuntarily I listened, too, but heard nothing except the lonely murmur of the breeze, and the distant forlorn note of a wood-pigeon. At length I touched his arm. He sprang to his feet, staring at me with vague alarm.

"I am sorry I startled you, but you did not hear me speak," I said. "Will you ——"

"How long have you been watching me?" he interrupted, brusquely.

"I have but this moment come," I returned. "I wish to look over the house."

He hesitated; and seemed half inclined to refuse me admission, but thinking better of it, nodded, and limped on before me to the door, drawing back to allow me to pass in. I found myself in a small tiled entrance hall, with doors on either hand. He threw open the one to the left, and ushered me into a dusky, low room, furnished in a style of quaint simplicity, which suited the character of the house.

"This is what they call Sir Richard's study," he explained. "The parlour across the hall is the same size, but better furnished. I can't show it you, for the door's locked, and—and I've mislaid the key."

His hesitation convinced me that he was telling an untruth; for some reason of his own he did not wish me to see the room. However, I only said quietly: "I think I noticed that the window was open; we can go in that way."

He reluctantly followed me, and stood outside as I entered

through the long window, which opened, like a door, upon the verandah.

The room in which I found myself was as great a contrast to the one I had just quitted as could well be imagined. With its polished floor and panelled walls; its light but elegant furniture, its crowd of dainty ornaments, and general look of airy brightness, it might have been transported bodily from a Parisian "Appartement." But I noticed with surprise, that it seemed to have been recently occupied by a lady. There were fresh flowers in the vases; music on the open piano, books on the table, and a work-basket, with a strip of embroidery, which seemed to have been just thrown down. I hastily drew back, and turned to my companion.

"I understood that the house was unoccupied," I said. "Why did you not tell me ——"

"There is no one here except myself," he interrupted.

"Then, to whom do these belong?" I enquired, pointing to the books and music.

"To no one in particular. They did belong to a lady who lived here for a time three years ago, but she's dead."

"You mean Mademoiselle Lestelle?"

He nodded, slowly passing his hand across his forehead.

"But how came they to be left here? Did no one claim them, after her death—no friend or relative?"

"She had no near relations, and few friends in this country. I have heard her say that she would leave no one to regret her. But she was mistaken there," he muttered.

I looked at him curiously. There was something in his face that attracted me, in spite of its harsh lines.

"You, at least, will not soon forget her, I am sure?" I said, after a pause. His lips curved in a smile half sad, half bitter.

"I have not so many friends that I can afford to forget that one. I suppose I may claim the dog's virtue—fidelity, if no other. I know that I would gladly have died upon her grave," he added, in a low tone of suppressed but passionate feeling which was a revelation to me. The next moment, however, he broke into a short laugh.

"You may well look astonished to hear such a romantic sentiment from 'Caliban,' as Sir Philip calls me. Sounds grotesque from my lips, doesn't it, sir?"

"You need not fear ridicule from me," I said, quietly. "I understand your feeling, and respect it."

He gave me a half-incredulous look, as if sympathy were something new to him. Then his face changed and softened, and with a quick impulsive movement he put out his hand.

"Thank you, sir—that's kindly spoken," he said, earnestly. "I'm sorry I told you a falsehood about the key—for it was a falsehood. I have it in my pocket. But—but this room, where she spent so many hours, is sacred to me; so sacred, that it seems sacrilege for a

stranger to enter it." He paused, looking round reverently, as if it were indeed a sanctuary.

"I have kept it just as it was when—when last she used it," he continued, in a low dreamy tone, speaking to himself more than to me. "I can almost fancy I see her bending over her book, or singing softly to herself as she worked. What a voice she had! It seemed to draw the heart out of my body. She used to let me sit in the verandah when she was singing, and she'd talk to me between whiles in her pretty broken English. She'd always a word and a smile for 'Jacques,' as she called me—always as gentle and courteous she was as if I'd been her friend and equal, instead of her servant. Ah! She was the sweetest soul that ever ——"

His voice broke; he hastily turned his head aside.

"I've got her portrait—the last she had taken, if you would like to see it," he resumed, after a moment, and took it from a worn leather pocket-book. It was the vignette photograph of a lovely girl of one or two and twenty, with a delicate, spiritual face, framed in cloudy dark hair; a sweet sorrowful mouth, and soft steadfast dark eyes.

"It is very like her," was my comment.

"Ah—you knew her?" he questioned, eagerly.

"No, but I have heard her sing more than once. Her face had not this sorrowful look when I saw her last. What was her trouble, I wonder? Did she ever speak of her past life?"

"No—yes. She sometimes talked of her childhood, when her parents were living."

"But not of her later years? She did not tell you why she gave up her profession?"

"She was not likely to take me into her confidence," he rejoined, evasively, and added, as if to avoid further questions: "Perhaps you would like to see the other rooms now?" And without waiting for my reply, he crossed the hall and led the way upstairs.

Before my tour of inspection was over, I had resolved to become the temporary tenant of The Cedars. Underwood received the announcement of my decision in silence.

"I suppose I shall have to turn out when you take possession?" he said at last, glancing at me half-wistfully.

"Not unless you are disinclined to remain as my servant," I replied.

"I shall be only too glad to stay, sir, and I'll do my best to please you," he responded. "I don't know whether you intend to bring a woman-servant with you; but, if not, I dare say Mrs. Foster, at the lodge, could recommend one."

"I will speak to her on my way back, and you may expect to see me this day week."

I slipped a coin into his hand, and we parted.

II.

A WEEK later I found myself once more entering the gates of Ranstone Park, having left my "traps" to be sent after me from Reading.

The evening was grey, moist, and cool. Rain had fallen in the morning, and the air was still charged with the sweet pastoral scent of wet earth and grass. "Autumn's fiery finger" had not yet touched the leaves, and the woods wore a green as fresh and rich as if the month had been June instead of August.

To come straight from the dust and turmoil of town to these sylvan solitudes was almost like being transported to another planet. The walk was so pleasant that I was half sorry when it was over, and I saw before me the solitary pavilion, with the woods behind it and the stream at its feet. I was received at the door by Mrs. Foster and a pleasant, fresh-faced young woman, whom she introduced as her niece.

"Martha can't be spared from home altogether, sir," she explained, "but she'll be here early every morning, and I think you'll find her a good cook. She's given the house a thorough cleaning, all but the drawing-room. Underwood has fastened the window and locked the door, and won't let her set foot in it. I really think the man is going out of his mind," she continued, following me into the study, where the cloth was laid for my solitary dinner. "Just look at him now, sir."

She pointed through the window to where the gardener was standing in the side-walk. He had paused in the act of pruning a rose-bush, and seemed to be listening intently to some sound proceeding from the lower end of the walk.

"He'll stand in that way for ten minutes together, listening to nothing," she whispered. "It gives me a creepy feeling to look at him. People do say that the cottage is haunted, and that he ——"

"Nonsense!" I interrupted; "he is evidently subject to some delusion. Have you any idea what it is?"

She shook her head, and was silent a moment, thoughtfully watching him. "He has never been the same man since that dreadful affair three years ago," she resumed, at length.

"What are you speaking of?"

She coloured and bit her lips. "I ought not to have mentioned it, as it may set you against the house—however, I dare say you would have heard of it from someone else. I mean the murder of Mademoiselle Lestelle."

"What!" I exclaimed, in horror. "Do you mean to say that she was murdered?"

"In this very house, on the night of the first of September, three years ago."

"Good heavens!—By whom?"

"That is a mystery to this hour. She was in the habit of sitting up rather late to practice her music, and that night Underwood, who was in bed, but not asleep, noticed that she broke off suddenly in the middle of a song. He thought it strange, and after waiting a few moments, threw on his clothes, and hurried downstairs. He found the poor young lady lying in a pool of her own blood—dead. She had been stabbed in the back as she sat at the piano. The window was open, and there were foot-prints in the garden, but the murderer, whoever it was, had had time to get clear away, and has never been traced from that day to this."

"What was supposed to be the motive of the crime?—robbery?"

"No, nothing was stolen; that's the mysterious part of it. You may think that Sir Philip was dreadfully shocked at such a thing happening on his estate. He himself offered a reward for information, but ——"

"Was no one even suspected at the time?" I interrupted.

My companion hesitated. "Well—one person was, sir."

"Who was that?"

She pointed to the gardener. I looked at her incredulously.

"Impossible!" I exclaimed. "Underwood—who was so devotedly attached to her!"

"Many people think he has madness in his blood," she whispered; "and it's well known that madmen often turn against the very person they love best when in their right senses. You see we have only his own account of what took place that night, for the housekeeper neither saw nor heard anything. The foot-prints may have been a cunning device to avert suspicion. Heaven forbid that I should accuse him wrongfully," she added in conclusion, "but everyone has noticed that since it happened, he has been like a man bewitched."

When she had left the room I stood for a moment, watching the gardener; then opened the window, and crossed the lawn to his side. He stood in the same attitude, with a rapt, ecstatic look on his face, as if he were listening to the "music of the spheres." He turned towards me as I approached, but did not appear to recognise me till I spoke.

"Day-dreaming again, Underwood?" I said. "It seems to be a habit of yours?"

He passed his hand over his forehead, as if to rouse himself, and pushed back his cap.

"A very stupid one. I must try to cure myself of it," he replied with a constrained smile.

"What were you listening to just now?" I asked point-blank.

He resumed his task, and made no reply.

"Why will you not tell me?"

"Because, if I did, you would think me mad."

"Delusion is not necessarily a sign of insanity," I said after a moment's pause. "Your delusion—if you have one—may arise from disordered nerves, or ——"

"I have no delusion," he interrupted. "My senses are quickened to hear a sound which is inaudible to others—that's all."

"What is the sound?" I persisted; but again there was no reply. I changed the subject.

"I hear that you have the key of the drawing-room; please to give it me."

He took it from his pocket at once, and handed it to me, muttering something about not wishing the things to be "meddled with."

"Nothing need be moved, for I don't intend to use that room," I replied; "but I should prefer to keep the key."

He looked up quickly. "Ah! they have told you, I see."

"Yes, I have been told what happened there," I assented, looking him full in the face. He met my eyes steadily, his lips curving in a slow, sardonic smile.

"Perhaps you know that I was suspected of the crime?"

"Unjustly, I am sure," I replied, speaking my conviction; for I could detect no shadow of guilty consciousness in the man's face: only bitterness and melancholy.

"How can you be sure of it? I may be a madman and a murderer for all you know to the contrary," he retorted with a short, brusque laugh. Then, with one of his sudden changes of manner, he threw down his knife, and turned upon me almost fiercely.

"Does a man destroy what he adores? I worshipped her—I would have died for her. And it was me—me! they accused of taking her innocent life. Fools that they were!"

With a passionate gesture of his clenched hands he turned from me and limped hurriedly away down the path. I saw no more of him that evening, but he occupied a large share of my thoughts, both then and in the days which followed. His presence seemed to add to the uncanny sort of fascination which the place possessed for me—something which at once repelled and attracted my imagination.

Yet if the place were haunted, it seemed haunted by nothing more terrible than the gracious memory of its late tenant, which pervaded every room, like a lingering echo, or a sweet faint perfume, giving it a melancholy and mysterious charm.

A fortnight passed away in uneventful tranquillity. I took long walks in the pleasant Berkshire lanes; angled in the stream, lounged in the garden, and spent quiet evenings with my books.

I had seen nothing more of my landlord (a circumstance which I hardly regretted), and my only connection with the outer world was through my cheerful and obliging little maid, who brought my letters and papers every morning, and regaled me with scraps of village gossip. I should thoroughly have enjoyed this "lotos-eating" exist-

ence but for the feeling of languor and depression which clung to me. For the first time in my life I was conscious of "nerves." I felt restless and ill-at-ease, and my sleep was disturbed by troubled dreams from which I woke, "in the dead waste and middle of the night," trembling with some nameless fear.

One night when I had started awake in this uncomfortable fashion, finding it impossible to compose myself to sleep again, I half dressed, lighted a cigar, and took my seat near the open window. The night was sultry and still. The moon had set, but the sky was full of stars, and their faint, diffused light showed me the garden, the stream, and the shadowy park beyond. The murmur of running water, scarcely heard by day, was distinctly audible in the silence, and now and then a languid breeze charged with the sweet aromatic odour which the sleeping earth breathes forth, just stirred the leaves and died away. Was it in the magical stillness of such a night as this, I wondered, that Léonie Lestelle had sung her last song—that song which was never finished?

Her face rose up before me with strange distinctness, and I seemed to be listening once more to the clear, silvery sweet tones of her exquisite voice, which had a tender thrill, like the wooing note of a dove. I recollected that when last I heard her sing—it was a private concert at Lady A——'s—she had chosen Beethoven's "Per pietà non dirmi addio!" The words haunted me, their musical syllables setting themselves to the murmur of the breeze and the ripple of the stream.

I do not know how long I had been sitting thus when I was roused from my reverie by another sound, coming from the room beneath—the key of which had been in my own possession since the day of my arrival. It did not at once arrest my attention, but stole upon me so gradually that I could not have told at what moment I first heard it. I turned from the window and listened.

Was I dreaming, I asked myself bewilderedly, or did I hear the faint sweet tones of a woman's voice singing the very song which haunted my memory? I started to my feet, and for a moment stood transfixed, paralysed, by a fear such as I had never before experienced. Recovering myself by an effort I took up the night-lamp and left the room.

I noiselessly descended the stairs, crossed the little tiled entrance-hall, and paused outside the door of the closed room. My heart beat fast and thick and a creeping chill stirred the roots of my hair as I stood in the hush of the sleeping house, listening—to what?

The voice of Léonie Lestelle. Faint and aerial as the notes of an Æolean harp; near, yet distant; sweet beyond words, but unutterably sad, it thrilled through the silence, breathing with tender, passionate entreaty: "Ah, per pietà non dirmi addio!" I forgot to feel afraid; I forgot even to wonder, as I listened with suspended breath to those

entrancing notes, and when they ceased I stood, as if spell-bound, longing to hear more of the sweet, unearthly music.

At length, when the silence had lasted some moments, I ventured to open the door. The room was dark and empty, the piano closed. As I stood on the threshold looking round, I felt a touch on my arm, and turning with a start, found Underwood at my side. He had been watching me unperceived. He beckoned me into the other room and closed the door before he spoke. His face was flushed; his eyes glittering with excitement, and a strange sort of triumph.

"You have heard it at last!" he breathed. "You know now that the sound is no 'delusion.' It is *her voice* that follows me night and day. Oh, my lady, my queen," he broke off, "why do you haunt me? What is it you want of me? If you would but speak instead of mocking me with those sweet piteous songs of yours ——"

He sank on to a chair near the table, burying his face in his hands.

I set down the lamp and took a seat at his side. "When did you first hear it?" I asked, involuntarily speaking in a whisper. He looked up, pushing back the disordered hair from his forehead.

"Last summer. The first time it was but a faint thin sound, like a distant echo, but every day it grew clearer and nearer, seeming to float in the air around me. It is not only in the house that I hear it, but out of doors in broad daylight, as if she were flitting about the garden singing to herself as she used to do. Sometimes she calls me—'Jacques, Jacques!' and her sweet, low laugh sounds so close that I can't help turning, half expecting to see her at my side."

I shuddered. "I wonder you have kept your senses!" I exclaimed.

"Do you think I am afraid of it? No—her voice is still to me what it always was, the sweetest sound on this side of heaven. It is only in spring and summer, during the months she lived here, that I hear it," he continued. "It ceases at midnight on the first of September; breaking off in the middle of a song—the very song she was singing when—when it happened."

I glanced at his face, and something I saw there confirmed a suspicion which had already occurred to me.

"Underwood," I said suddenly, leaning forward with my arms on the table; "can you honestly assure me that you do not know or suspect who took her life?"

He looked at me fixedly a moment, then answered, in a tone of curious composure: "I have known all along."

I drew back, and stared at him.

"Then, why in heaven's name did you not speak at the time?"

"My lips were sealed by a promise."

"Given to whom? Who bound you to silence?"

"*She* did, with her last breath, that fatal night, when I found her, lying in the moonlight, with her life ebbing away from the cruel wound. She saw in my face that I guessed who had struck the blow, and with all the strength that was left in her she implored —commanded me never to tell. It was her husband—for she was married, though the world did not know it. I have kept the secret so far, but I feel that if I don't share it with someone, I shall go mad in earnest. It is eating my heart away. I dare not break my vow, but you shall know the truth."

"From whom? How shall I know it—and when?"

He rose and pushed back his chair, pointed over his shoulder, then bent his lips to my ear.

"Watch with me in that room on the night of the first of September, and you shall learn the secret."

Before I could speak again, he was gone.

III.

THE last week of August was stormy and wet. Summer took flight hurriedly, scared by the wild gales and heavy rain which stripped the branches and laid the flowers low. The green arcades of the park were dank and dripping; the sunny glades, forlorn; the avenues carpeted with fallen leaves, and the little river, transformed from a stream to a torrent, had overflowed its banks, inundating the lower end of the Cedars lawn, and carrying away the hand-rails, and some planks of the bridge.

The tempestuous weather culminated on the first of September. From dawn till dark the wind blew and the rain fell "as they would never weary;" but in spite of both, I was abroad all the afternoon, being in a restless, excited mood which would not allow me to remain between four walls.

The light of a stormy sunset was fading into dusk when I returned through the park, tired and wet, after a long tramp through miry country lanes. As I emerged from the plantation which bordered the stream, I was surprised to see Sir Philip Ranstone, who was standing on the bank, near the bridge. Buttoned up in his ulster he leaned against a tree, smoking, in serene indifference to wind and rain, with a large black retriever at his feet.

The dog started up as I approached, barking violently, and Sir Philip turned.

"Ah! good evening, Mr.—a—Wilford," he said, coming towards me. "Awful weather, isn't it? But I see you defy the elements, like myself."

"I was tired of staying indoors," I explained.

"I should think so; you must be bored to extinction in that dull hole, with no company but your own."

"I am fond of my own company," I said, smiling. "I am never bored when alone."

He glanced at me with languid curiosity. "Really. H'm—I can't say as much. I think in your place I should be ready to fraternise with Underwood—bear as he is—in default of other society."

"Underwood and I are very good friends, Sir Philip. I find he improves on acquaintance."

"There is room for improvement," was his comment. "By the way," he continued, knocking the ash from his cigar, "I should very much like to know whether he is the author of an absurd report which has only lately reached my ears—that The Cedars is haunted. It struck me that it might be an ingenious device of his to keep tenants away."

I shook my head. "I am quite sure that he has never told—I mean that he has never spread such a report."

He turned and looked at me. "You seem to think there is some truth in it," he remarked.

I felt no inclination to take him into my confidence, and stooped to stroke his dog without replying.

"Am I to conclude from your silence that you do?" he persisted, with an ironical smile. "Come, Mr. Wilford, you don't mean to tell me that you, a man of the world, and a lawyer to boot, actually believe in ghosts?"

I hesitated a moment, then looked up. "I believe in the evidence of my own senses," I said quietly.

"You excite my curiosity," he sneered. "What uncanny thing have you seen, I wonder?"

"I have seen nothing; it is a sound which haunts the house."

"A sound?" he repeated, with a quick change of tone. "What sort of sound?"

"A voice," I said, slowly. "The voice of the ill-fated girl who met her death beneath its roof."

The cigar fell from his hand. "Good heavens!" he breathed. "What do you mean? It is not ——"

"Yes, Sir Philip; it is the voice of Léonie Lestelle. I have heard her singing as plainly as I heard you speak just then."

He looked at me blankly, the colour fading from his face, and his dark eyes dilating till they seemed all pupil. Recovering himself, however, he stooped to pick up his cigar, and burst into a scornful laugh.

"Preposterous! you must have been dreaming, or else it is some trick of Underwood's."

"Could Underwood imitate such a voice as hers? Besides—he has heard it himself. It has haunted him for the last two years."

Sir Philip drew in his lips, and was silent a moment. "That is strange," he said, at length. "Why should it haunt him, of all

people, unless—" he glanced at me significantly—" unless there is some foundation for the suspicion which still clings to him."

" I am quite sure there is none," I answered, warmly.

" Other people do not share your conviction," was his reply. " It is because no one in the neighbourhood would give him the shelter of a roof that I have allowed him to remain at the cottage. However, he will soon have to find fresh quarters, for I am determined to have the house pulled down. Haunted or not, it is a gloomy, ill-omened place."

And, indeed, it looked so at this moment, with the shadows of the stormy twilight gathering round it, and a white mist rising, wraith-like, from the stream. He stared at it moodily, pulling the long ends of his moustache. " Where did you hear the—the sound ? " he asked, after a pause. " In what part of the house ? "

" In the room where the tragedy occurred."

He shivered slightly, and threw away his half-smoked cigar.

" The probability is that you had been thinking of that horrible affair, and imagination did the rest. As to Underwood, everyone knows he is half-mad. Anyhow, you will oblige me by keeping the story to yourself. I will wish you good evening now," he continued, glancing at his watch ; " or, rather, good-bye, for I am going abroad in a few days, and shall probably not see you again."

He bowed without offering me his hand, whistled to his dog, and walked away.

Dusk deepened into dark, and the wind instead of subsiding, seemed to increase in violence as the night advanced. The fierce, fitful gusts came sweeping down upon the house, as if bent on unroofing it ; now swelling to a roar which made the walls vibrate, then dying away in a long eerie wail. Towards midnight the rain ceased, and the clouds, rent and scattered by the wind, drifted apart like fragments of a torn veil, leaving a space of clear, violet-dark sky, in which the moon rode serenely. Her light touched the brimming stream with silver, and flecked the lawn with fantastic shadows of the tossing trees, giving something of wild poetry to the scene.

Underwood and I were in the second hour of our strange vigil, which so far, had been uninterrupted. I sat near the window ; my companion on a low chair at the farther end of the room, his elbows on his knees, his forehead resting on his hands ; both of us silent and motionless. The room was unlighted, and both door and window were shut. The atmosphere was close and heavy, and at length, feeling suffocated, I rose and opened the long window, admitting a rush of chill, damp air.

I stood for a moment looking out at the wild night, and as I glanced towards the bridge, I thought I distinguished a man's figure in the act of crossing it—a figure which, even at that distance, seemed familiar. And yet—what could bring Sir Philip to the place at this

untimely hour? I was still straining my eyes through the shadows, when a movement of my companion made me turn hastily from the window. The moonlight showed me that he had risen, and stood grasping the back of his chair, gazing with a look of awe-struck expectation towards the door.

My heart began to throb with the same mysterious dread which I had experienced before. As I held my breath to listen, a faint rustling sound struck my ear, like the soft "frou-frou" of a woman's dress. It crossed the room from the door to the piano, passing close to me —so close, that I involuntarily drew back, thrilling in every nerve.

There was a pause, filled by wailing wind and rushing water, then—near to us, yet immeasurably distant, like a divine echo from another world, the solemn, spiritual voice arose.

This time both words and music were English, and there was a ring of passionate pain in its tone which brought the tears to my eyes as I listened.

All the anguish of a breaking heart seemed to find expression in "The Song of Love and Death."

> "Sweet is true love, tho' given in vain, in vain;
> And sweet is death, who puts an end to pain:
> I know not which is sweeter, no, not I."

In the interval after the first verse I caught the sound of footsteps approaching up the gravel walk, and presently, a figure appeared at the window, darkly outlined against the moonlit background.

I had not been mistaken; it was Sir Philip. Underwood, whose head was turned towards the piano, did not notice the visitor, nor did the latter appear to perceive that the room was occupied. After a moment's hesitation, he pushed back the lace curtains and noiselessly entered—or was about to enter; but, in the very act of crossing the threshold, he stopped short and recoiled, for at the same moment the song was resumed:

> "Love, art thou sweet? then bitter death must be:
> Love, thou art bitter? sweet is death to me.
> Oh Love, if death be sweeter ——"

There was a sudden break; a quick, short, gasping cry. Involuntarily I glanced towards the watcher at the window. He stood as if turned to stone, and his face, livid in the moonlight, looked like a mask of fear.

There was a silence of several moments—silence within and without, for the fitful wind was hushed. The voice sank to a broken, inarticulate murmur, and died away in a long, shuddering sigh. Then all was still. After a moment, Underwood passed his hand over his eyes, then turned to speak to me. But at the same instant he caught sight of Sir Philip, and, with a hoarse cry of mingled rage and triumph, sprang forwards to the window, and seized him by the throat.

"Villain! traitor! murderer!" he uttered, in a breathless tone of concentrated passion. "I have spared you too long. By heaven, you shall not escape me now!"

Startled by the unexpected attack, Sir Philip staggered backwards and would have fallen, if he had not caught at one of the rustic pillars of the verandah. Recovering himself, however, he shook off his assailant, and casting a wild, panic-stricken glance around, darted across the lawn. The gardener hurried in pursuit, and I mechanically followed, feeling as if all the events of the night were part of a wild and troubled dream.

In spite of his lameness, Underwood gained on the other, and was close behind him when he reached the gate. Sir Philip quickened his pace and hurried over the bridge. But when half-way across it, his foot caught in one of the loose planks; he stumbled, put out his hand blindly in search of the missing rail, lost his balance, and fell headlong into the deepest part of the stream.

I uttered a cry of dismay, and dashed on to the bridge, where Underwood was standing, his dark hair disordered by the wind, staring blankly down at the spot where the baronet had disappeared.

The latter rose to the surface some yards below the bridge, struggling helplessly against the headstrong current. The moonlight gleamed for a moment on his white face, showing the look of terror and anguish imprinted on it—a look which haunts me still.

"Underwood!" he gasped; "you can swim—help! save me."

For all reply, the gardener deliberately folded his arms, looking down at him with a dreadful smile.

"Surely you will not let him drown before your eyes!" I exclaimed; "remember, vengeance is not yours. Save him ——"

"Not if I could do it by lifting a finger," was his stern reply.

I said no more, perceiving that my words would have no more effect on him than the wind which was raving above our heads. I turned, and was hurrying away, in the faint hope of being able to give aid from the bank, when, without otherwise changing his position, he put out a hand and grasped my wrist, holding it as in a vice.

"Stay where you are," he said, in a stern imperative undertone. "It is just that he should perish—a life for a life!"

But even as the words passed his lips, his grasp suddenly relaxed; he dropped my wrist and stepped back a pace from me. Glancing at his face I saw in it a change so extraordinary that it arrested my attention even in the midst of my excitement.

He was gazing intently at something in the space between us; something which was visible to himself alone, for to me there seemed only air and moonlight. What did he see? What was it that brought that look of mingled awe and rapture to his dark face, transfiguring every feature? He gazed steadily for a moment, then bowed his head as if in assent.

"So be it, dear angel," he whispered; "I will do your bidding—if it is not too late."

Without another word he threw off his coat and plunged into the stream. A few vigorous strokes brought him to the spot where the baronet had sunk for a second time. He dived, and presently reappeared supporting him with one muscular arm, while with the other he struck out for the bank. But his movements were impeded by Sir Philip, who clung to him with the convulsive energy of a drowning man.

"If you value your life, loose my arms! How can I swim, hampered like this?" I heard Underwood cry, as the swift current swept them on past a turn of the stream. I hurried along the bank, but it was some moments before I caught sight of them again. The gardener was still struggling in a desperate but ineffectual effort to shake off the frantic clasp which was dragging them both under water.

As I stood watching them with breathless anxiety, a passing cloud veiled the moon, and for a moment blotted out the scene. In that brief interval of darkness a wild despairing cry rose above the rushing of the river and the roaring of the wind. When the moon looked forth again they had sunk to rise no more.

The bodies of the two men, still closely locked together, were found, entangled in water-weeds, some yards lower down the stream. The account I gave of the accident was confirmed by the condition of the bridge, and my statement that Underwood had perished in endeavouring to save his master, caused a complete revulsion of feeling towards the gardener, who having been shunned as a criminal during his life-time, was honoured as a hero after his death.

What brought Sir Philip to the cottage that night remained a mystery to all but myself. Immediately after the inquest I returned to town, feeling no inclination to remain in a place haunted by such terrible associations. I have never revisited Ranstone, nor until now have I ever disclosed what I know concerning the beautiful but ill-fated tenant of The Cedars.

THE CRUISE OF THE RESERVE SQUADRON.

By Charles W. Wood,

Author of "Through Holland," "In the Black Forest," etc.

THE hours had passed swiftly after leaving Malaga. The night was soft and warm, as only these southern nights can be. The moon, like a globe of liquid silver, rolled steadily through the dark blue sky, where the stars flashed like diamond points. The sea was calm and still, the boat comfortable and not crowded. We watched the lights of Malaga diminish and disappear, followed for a time the outlines of the coast, thrown into vivid relief by the moonlight, and presently went below.

Sleep needed no wooing, and when the steamer anchored next morning in Gibraltar Bay, moments rather than hours seemed to have passed away. In the grey dawn the Rock towered silent and asleep, and we, in quarantine, waited for Pratique to set us free. This said pratique is often a great nuisance, the cause of much trouble and delay. Where a boat comes from an infected place or country, the regulation cannot be too much enforced; but where this is not the case some discretion might surely be left to the captain of the vessel.

I remember, for example, that last winter the steamer from Malta reached Syracuse hours before the morning train started for Catania. It was of the utmost consequence to two passengers, on business, not on pleasure, bent, to catch this train. The agents in Malta had assured them it could, would, and should be done. But the doctor, that morning, was not in a mood to hurry for anyone, and about half an hour after the train had started he sauntered on board, ran the gauntlet of the few passengers, and declared them free. The next train did not leave for eight hours.

It was not so bad as this with us at Gibraltar; no train awaited us; but we did wish to return to the *Defence* before proceeding on to Tangiers.

Presently the boats of the *Defence* and the *Lord Warden* were seen approaching, pratique was declared, and away we went. To stand once more on the old deck was like returning to a large town, and for a moment we revelled in space. But there was little time to spare, and the Captain's galley was soon taking us back to the French steamer, now getting under weigh for the coast of Africa. Three only had found courage and perseverance to venture, including Mr. Edward Jago and Broadley. The courier had done his duty so well that we felt it almost due to him that he should accompany us, and he did so.

The journey across the Straits is rather more than thirty miles, and

we ought to reach Tangiers before one o'clock. The morning was intensely hot, the sky cloudless, the deep blue sea had not a ripple. Thus had it been for many days. The shores of Spain grew faint, the Rock diminished, the African coast opened up, and presently Tangiers, a white object upon sloping hills, became more and more visible. We anchored in the bay, and were immediately surrounded by boats and half-naked men, who shouted, fought, and seemed ready to murder each other for precedence.

From the water Tangiers looked excessively eastern, distinct and different from anything to be seen on the other side the Straits. But we were in another quarter of the globe, amongst a separate race. The houses, rising on the slopes of two hills, looked white and cool with their flat, white roofs; and the fact of their having no chimneys added to their singular appearance.

The mosque towers and minarets stood conspicuously above the houses. In broad, hot sunshine, the town yet looked pleasant and dazzling. It also looked sweet and wholesome—save the mark! We thought what a charming and civilised place we had come to; what a pity that we should have less than twenty-four hours for enjoyment therein. The fort, crowning the hill and overlooking the water, stood out boldly; a moorish gateway at the end of the short, steep pathway was very picturesque and romantic. Nothing could exceed the beauty of colour and clearness of the water, from deep blue to the most transparent aqua marine, as it rolled over its golden sands, leaving the shores beyond high-water mark pure and glistening. Indeed, we seemed bathed, as it were, in purity and sunshine and intoxicating ether, which threw a glow over one's imagination, and raised one's spirits to fever heat. A sixth sense was developed, which swallowed up all the other senses in the mere delight of existence.

We managed to scramble into a boat, narrowly escaping being torn to pieces in the struggle, and landing in the same simplicity of costume as that affected by our clamorous boatmen. Once upon a time, all passengers had to be hoisted on to the shoulders of these shiny Moors—a penalty that might have atoned for many sins. Now they have a sort of moveable stage, which stretches from the boat to the shore—a distance of only a few feet—and enables you, without other aid, to escape to land.

The hotel was at hand; merely up one street and down another. Yet was it distant enough to convince us that Tangiers, true to its reputation, certainly could not, in some respects, have made any progress during the last thousand years. This was what we had come to see; had been desirous of seeing. How could we tell that far, very far more than the sense of sight would be exercised in the service of experience?

It would be impossible to describe the smells. My companions, right and left, both nearly fainted over and over again in that short walk. I felt that now my hands were full, and my responsibilities had

begun. I was about to have charge of two invalids in a foreign country, amidst an unknown tongue. Yet I, as sensitive as anyone about smells, and with about as much strength in my whole body as they had in their little fingers, happily remained unaffected. The back is fitted to the burden. Had we all three succumbed, I am persuaded that a melancholy cortége, consisting of three corpses, would have returned to the Royal Reserve Squadron.

The boatmen shouldered our small amount of luggage, and we followed them more leisurely up hill, under the broiling sun. In the narrow thoroughfare we met a few straggling Moors wrapped in their gehabs or abbas. Turning a sharp corner, and passing down to the left, we came full tilt upon two Moors and a mule quarrelling at the very height of their voices, gesticulating, raving, ready to tear each other's eyes out. The men were behaving in this manner, not the mule. The animal was patiently listening, and under any circumstances would have known better. We, too, were obliged to stand and listen, for mule and belligerents between them blocked up the entire gangway, paying no more attention to us than if we had been phantoms. There came a moment when they seemed about to fly at each other's throats; dark, lusty, powerful men, with swarthy complexions and flashing glances, and faces heated with passion; strong enough and determined enough, apparently, to knock down the very walls against which one of them was leaning.

"What are they quarrelling about?" one of us asked of Wiley.

"One man says he has paid the other man some money: the other man says he hasn't," replied Wiley. "The one who says the money hasn't been paid declares he will keep the other man's mule until he does pay him. A Moor would as soon part with his life as with his mule, you know, sir. In a few minutes they'll pull each other's beards, and the mule, between them, will come in for some rough handling."

We did not stay for the last act of this lively drama. Slipping past the combatants, when a closer proximity to each other—though not inspired by the tender chords of affection—left an opening in the way, we soon after reached the hotel. Mr. Jago and Broadley sank into chairs.

"Are these smells indigenous to Tangiers?" asked Mr. Jago, in feeble tones.

"Bless you, sir, they are," replied the landlord, "if by indigenous you mean customary. Why, sir, Tangiers would be nothing without its smells. It would lose half its reputation."

"There's such a thing as a bad reputation," mildly protested Broadley, in a voice that seemed to come from underground.

"Quite true, sir," returned the landlord; "but these smells, I assure you, are wholesome; there's nothing bad about them. You may go amongst them with impunity."

Mr. Jago and Broadley looked at each other, and I felt how often looks can express infinitely more than words.

"Our wisest plan is to have some luncheon before going out again," I remarked. "We shall thus, as far as possible, be fortified against all evils."

"Decidedly the best thing, sir!" cried the landlord, briskly. "And if I make these gentlemen some Moorish tea—a sort of lemon mint much used in this part of the world—it will at once put strength and spirit into them."

"An excellent decoction," said Mr. Jago, reviving. "I've heard

TANGIERS, FROM THE SEA.

of it before, and place great faith in it. Bring us a good supply, landlord."

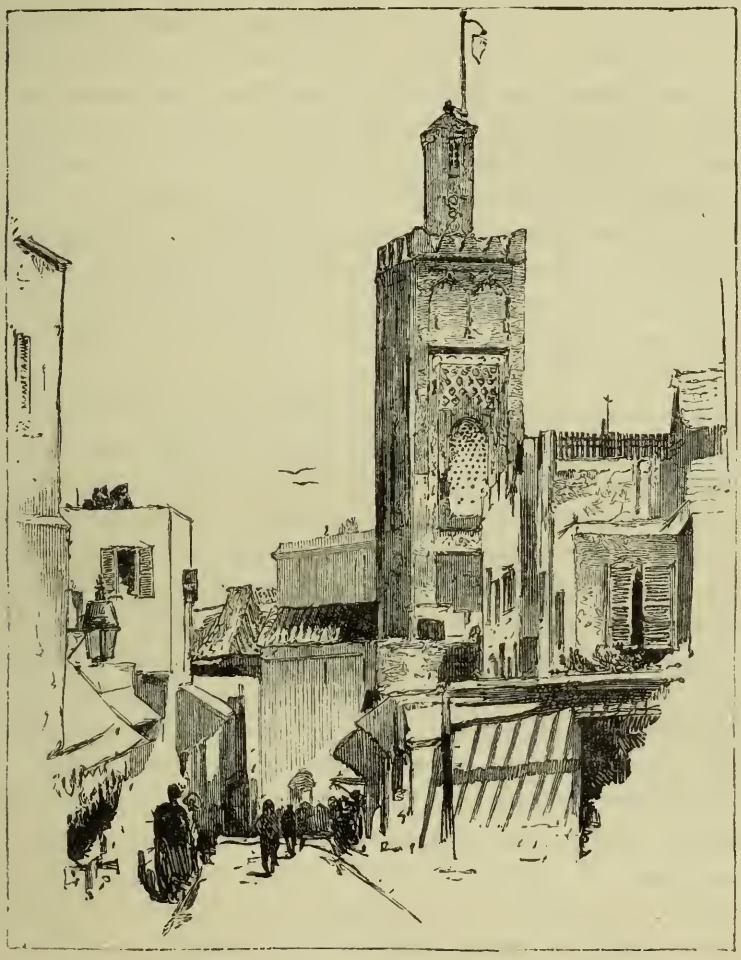
After lunch and the lemon tea they seemed to recover health and spirits. We sallied forth to reconnoitre this town, that had not changed its manners and customs for a thousand years.

It was smaller than we had anticipated, with narrow streets all up and down hill, and houses for the most part poor and insignificant. Not a street in the whole place seemed given up to anything representing wealth or fashion. Originally the houses had nearly all been white; the greater part were so still; it is a necessity as well as a virtue, and, as far as possible, keeps the heat of the sun from penetrating into the interiors.

Shops, such as we see in European towns, were not visible, and

the streets, therefore, have not this feminine attraction about them. They are represented chiefly by bazaars, many of which are to be found up narrow staircases or at the end of small passages, leading, one might suppose from appearances, to some bourne whence no traveller could reasonably expect to return. Thus, only the initiated in these labyrinthine mysteries are able to guide you safely to the abodes of Oriental craft and cunning.

Craft and cunning in every sense of the word. If Tangiers itself



MOSQUE TOWER, TANGIERS.

has stood still for a thousand years, and its people are as primitive in habits and customs as they were then, exception must be made in favour of the owners of these bazaars. Expecting to meet here all that was innocent and candid, we were not prepared to find these Moorish traders ready and willing to take you in with a truly Eastern magnificence.

On entering they bow down to you with a kingly dignity, and treat you with a deference gratifying from every point of view. They offer you a photograph of their bazaar, and invite you to a cup of Moorish

coffee. Here, you murmur, is that Oriental uprightness of character and bearing that has descended to them as a heritage from ages past. We felt that we were in the hands of grave and honest men. There was no mistaking that calm look, the open eye that gazed straight at you and never flinched. We prepared for great bargains. Pyramid, the Commander, Darrille and others had loaded us with commissions. We were to take them back brass trays from Tetuan, daggers from Fez, steel blades from Damascus, Moorish costumes for fancy balls, hand tapestry for cushions, and I know not what—we should probably get a mule and a Moor thrown into our bargains.

The first bazaar we visited was at the bottom of one of these culs-de-sac. We groped up a winding staircase, and found at last quite large rooms on the first floor, crammed with Oriental splendours; knick-knacks of every description; carpets, lanterns, swords, abbas; dresses that would have created a sensation in England; the identical brass trays we were in search of; everything, in short, imagination could conceive. The owners—there were a pair of them—talked broken English that sounded innocent and picturesque. They knew just enough to understand and be understood—and to drive a bargain.

A carpet caught our eye; one of those Oriental carpets of many colours and no particular pattern, much affected in these days of Dutch imitation and Queen Anne revival. It is a craze, by the way, this "revival" in art and furniture, and will go the way of all crazes. The other day a friend refurnished his house from top to bottom, to please his charming but slightly capricious wife. No sooner comfortably (or uncomfortably) settled, than they discovered the shape of the rooms and the general style of the house to be out of harmony with the furniture. This was unendurable. There was only one thing to be done. Having bought the furniture for the house, they must now build a house for the furniture. Lares and Penates were warehoused, the house pulled down, and my friend and his charming wife have gone travelling abroad for a year, whilst a famous architect of advanced views builds them a house on a pure Dutch model to suit their upholstery.

One of these admirable carpets caught our eye. It was the very thing to take back to England to some æsthetic friend or relative. No doubt over here—in this town of the manners and customs of a thousand years ago—we should get it for a mere song. I can only say that personal experience leads to the conclusion that the broad outlines of human nature are the same everywhere and in all ages. In a thousand years they must, indeed, have undergone less change than the general aspect of the world itself.

We enquired the price of the carpet.

"Twenty-five pounds," said the dignified Moor, with an inflexion of voice that seemed to protest against a positive sacrifice.

"Twenty-five pounds!" we repeated in astonishment. "Why,

that was infinitely dearer than England—thrice as dear as Gibraltar."

Of course the Moor took refuge in *quality*. This was the *real* thing. Gibraltar—England—no one ever knew there what they were buying. However, he would say a little less—twenty pounds.

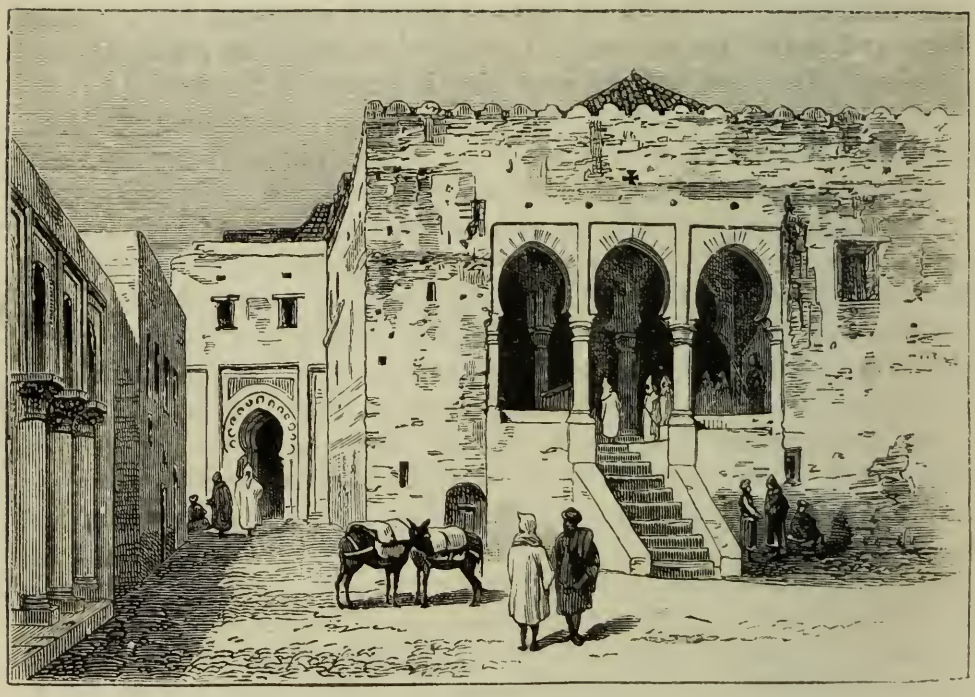
So the Dutch auction went on, until the auctioneer had come down to nine pounds; all done in the most innocent and matter-of-fact manner. He was giving away his carpet to oblige us. This was a truly Eastern magnificence of character and generosity. Finally, if we would not give nine pounds, what *would* we give? It should be ours at our own price. At last, convinced that the man must have stolen the carpet, we declined it at any price whatever. We bought nothing from him except a few brass trays of designs too good to be passed over, and went on to what the courier said was *the* bazaar of Tangiers. In point of size and site, it certainly merited its reputation. A large, imposing, Moorish archway displayed Oriental mysteries. The owner of these very pretty things, Wiley informed us, was as honest as the day. *Was* he?

They have a way of offering you—these inheritors of the manners and customs of 1,000 years ago—one or two trivial articles so absurdly cheap that they might as well give them away at once. Having thus taken you off your guard, and established a feeling of trust in your mind, they next proceed to business, and ask for their more important articles five or six times as much as they intend to take.

But after our late experience, we felt convinced that we were not to be done. Brass trays, rugs, embroidered cloths, cushions, dresses of softest fabric, daggers, and various other articles, were purchased in rash confidence. It is hard to say how far we were imposed upon: perhaps, after all, not to any very great extent; but upon asking the price of a Moorish inkstand in Gibraltar, similar to one bought at Tangiers, I found that I had paid exactly three times its value. That inkstand naturally became a sore subject, especially as Broadley was for ever sarcastically digging it up from its sepulchre at the bottom of a huge deal box; and as soon as we reached England I gave away the offending article.

All purchases completed, the remainder of the afternoon was devoted to the town. On passing the Mosque, I was about to enter, when Broadley and the guide laid violent hands upon me, declaring that, had I gone in, probably it would have been, like another Thomas à Becket, to fall a victim to the dagger of some fanatic. Having no ambition for so tragic an end, I contented myself with looking through the opening on each side the doorway. Moors were at their devotions, now raising themselves to their full height, now almost prostrate upon the marble floor. Movements, ceremonies and genuflexions seemed strangely heathenish and superstitious. The little that could be seen made one anxious for more, but we had to pass on with curiosity ungratified.

There are many interesting spots in Tangiers. Ancient Moorish gateways, whose deep arches, full of solemn beauty, looked as if they indeed might have existed a thousand years. Turbaned Moors wrapped in their abbas traversed the streets, urging on their patient, well-laden mules: eastern, picturesque groups not to be found out of Africa. Scene, place, and people were a vivid contrast to anything we had found elsewhere. Here and there, a Moorish archway or window recalled to us for a moment some portions of the Alhambra, though with little of the beauty and none of the romance and magic that for ever surround and overshadow those ancient halls and courts of Granada.

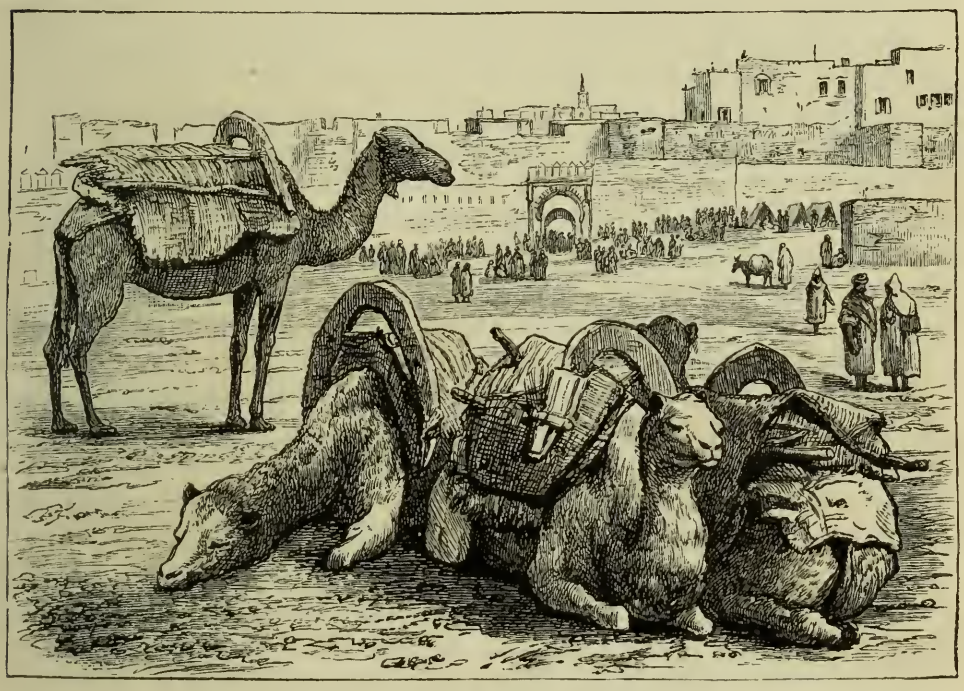


TREASURY, TANGIERS.

Handsome, stalwart, firm-footed, well-made men were many of these Moors, with features that appeared to indicate a distinct and elevated race. Noble heads and faces had they, types of true manly beauty. One longed to sketch them, but the moment they found out what you were doing, they disappeared as if a very demon had been in pursuit. With them it is an ingrained superstition. Scarcely one will allow himself to be taken. Your only chance is to make yourself as invisible as possible, and sketch in your head before you are observed.

The women went about like bundles of sacking, their faces—with the exception of half an eye to steer by—entirely hidden. As far as could be made out, they were distinctly inferior to the men in form and feature, but we had little opportunity of judging. If we

came upon one suddenly in some lonely thoroughfare, with face uncovered, the moment she caught sight of Broadley she hastily adjusted her hood and fled. They certainly looked neither becoming nor alluring, nor in any way dangerous to one's peace of mind, as they shuffled along in these great wrappers that covered head and face and form, and never by any accident fell aside. Did we by chance meet one unveiled, she invariably turned out to be a toothless old hag, ugly and wrinkled enough to form part and parcel of the traditions handed down for a thousand years. And even she, with the force of habit, on passing us would turn her face to the wall, lest the sight of so much female charm should prove too much for well



WITHOUT THE WALLS, TANGIERS.

disposed but frail human nature. This custom also, amongst others, made us forcibly realise that we were in an Eastern town.

We found the market place crowded with Moors, a few of them leading mules and camels. The water carriers, with skins slung round them like inverted bagpipes, kept up a deafening cry, in their efforts to administer to the wants of man and add to their little store. The heat was indeed intolerable enough to parch the least thirsty soul. The sun poured down upon us one bright, intense flood, but the Moors, with their dark complexions and loose linen abbas, seemed indifferent to the heat. Nevertheless, one did not care to go too near them; they looked unctuous and shining, their bodies and clothes alike strangely unfamiliar with water.

Some were squatting on the ground in charge of what looked like

bags and barrels of meal or grain, and nearly all were either buying or selling. It was the provision market, and round the high, hoary walls booths or sheds were erected. In many of these sheds was a small stove for an open fire, and the presiding genius—a dark-eyed Moor, in a turban and little else—held a long iron skewer, on which he was sticking, at short intervals, small balls of what appeared to be forced meat. Evidently they wanted much persuading into a particular form, for he rubbed them round and round in his swarthy hands, until, as we imagined their being eaten, we turned quite interestingly faint and feeble. These, fashioned to his liking, were lodged over the fire, until roasted and ready for sale. Hundreds of these little meated skewers were exposed to tempt the hungry. We watched many a Moor approach, buy one, go on to the next booth, and invest in a small, round, flat cake that looked all flour and water, or a thick hunch of bread that at least had the merit of substance. Next, happy as a king, he would squat upon the ground and deliver himself up to the delights of his feast.

The whole scene was truly Eastern, and to us interesting. We had encountered nothing like it on our travels, and, for the present, should not again be likely to see anything of its kind. I don't know that we grieved on that account. A little of the heat and smells of Tangiers went a very long way. Close contact with the Moors in the market-place was not encouraging to a philanthropic view of humanity. We were not sorry to get beyond the confines of these four prison-like walls, where, unable to escape the crowd, one felt uncomfortable and half suffocated.

In our peregrinations we visited the gaol, and there must be a good deal of wickedness going on that needs restraining, for it was crowded with prisoners. One could not help pitying them—though probably it was a waste of emotion—for they looked miserable enough; yet miserable more in condition than expression. We failed to discover any especial marks of shame, or deep repentance, or heart-breaking remorse. They regretted their liberty, no doubt, but did not seem to feel their position. It may be that, here, less stigma attaches to these wholesome restrictions of the law, these temporary "retreats" from the world, than in places that have not enjoyed the privilege of standing still for a thousand years.

But at least they were not made comfortable—though the Moors seem unacquainted with our ideas of personal ease. We were admitted into a large room, hot, and badly lighted. The floor consisted of the bare earth. The prisoners were squatting about, and some, as we entered, turned their faces away, or covered them up; not from shame, but in order that our curiosity should not be gratified. Perhaps, too, they were afraid of being sketched. Many of them were at work, some in making baskets and mats, which they are allowed to sell for their own benefit. Out of curiosity, and by way of experiment, we offered one of the prisoners, for a small straw

basket, less than the price he had asked. In a moment, with all the air of a spoilt child, he threw it behind him, turned sulky, and would not speak or look at us again. Then the keeper of this strange menagerie came up, remonstrated with the offended dignity, and coaxed the man back to good temper. The basket was again offered to us with a sheepish air that was irresistible, and the man received his demand in full. He now looked as pleased as a child with a new toy; the gaoler patted him on the back, and we departed.

Contiguous to the prison was a very different institution—the Bank or Treasury; an old, picturesque building with a flight of steps crowned by Moorish arches that led into a hall or vestibule where a number of pillars supported the arched roof. The whole of this small square was interesting and ancient looking, with its gateways and recesses, its deep lights and shadows. In such spots lay the chief interest of Tangiers; while gazing, you were really carried back into the past centuries, and realised the antiquity of this Moorish town.

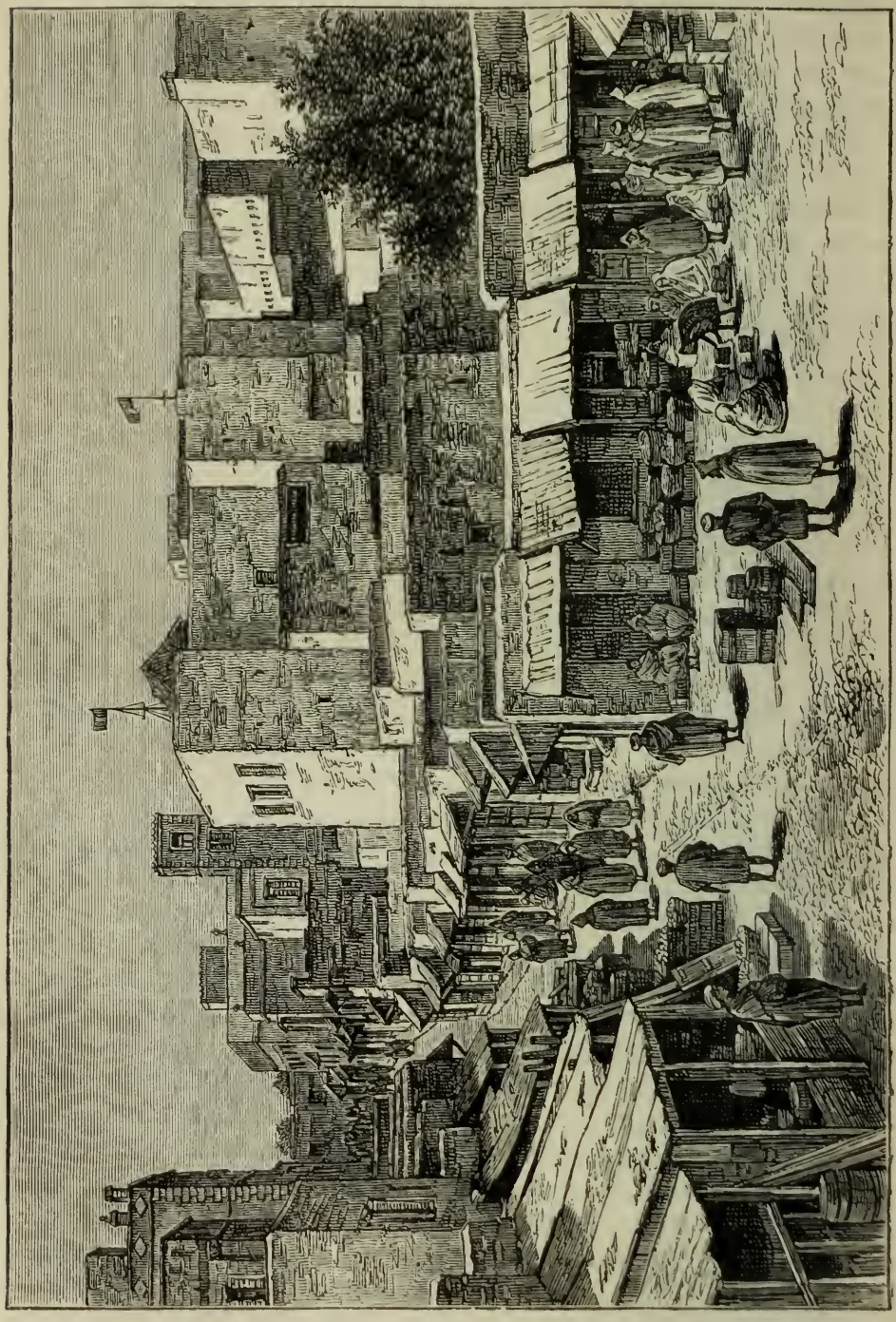
But perhaps the most Eastern and unfamiliar sight was the caravanserai outside the walls of the town. A great plain, crowded with Moors and camels; men in every attitude, squatting or lying full length upon the ground, or leaning against their animals, talking and arguing with each other. The number of men and beasts seemed unlimited, and all alike looked venerable and sedate, picturesque and time-honoured. Here, no doubt, was the veritable sight one might have seen a thousand years ago; and many of the Moors, from their high-cast type and dignified mien, might have had direct ancestors encamping outside those very walls in the days when Morocco was a power in the then known world. The brilliant blue of the sky, the inexhaustible sunshine, the calm, exquisite sea sleeping a little to the right, the pure, light, sparkling air—all added to the charm of this little glimpse we were able to get of Eastern life and a true Eastern picture.

As much as anything, perhaps, we enjoyed the freshness of the air and the beauty of the view from the elevated citadel that almost overhung the water. Here in a moment's combination, we saw people and plains and far-off hills, and the lovely Mediterranean that plashed so lazily, so soothingly at our feet. The town below us reposed on the slopes, its white houses and flat roofs looking very Eastern, very dazzling in the sunshine. We traced the walls of the town, the prison and the bank, the mosques and the squares. The narrow, crooked streets, where wretched looking, half-famished curs trotted about in search of prey; where men squatted, and women, veiled and mysterious, hurried along. We were above the smells and disagreeable influences; the scene suggested only beauty and repose, as if nothing could there exist that was not of spotless virtue and purity unsullied.

The afternoon was waning. Now and again I had been anxiously watching my two companions, and did not altogether like their

looks. Both were pale, languid, and frequently abstracted. I held a moment's consultation with the courier.

"What do you make of this?" I said. "Is it a common experi-



LESSER MARKET, TANGIERS.

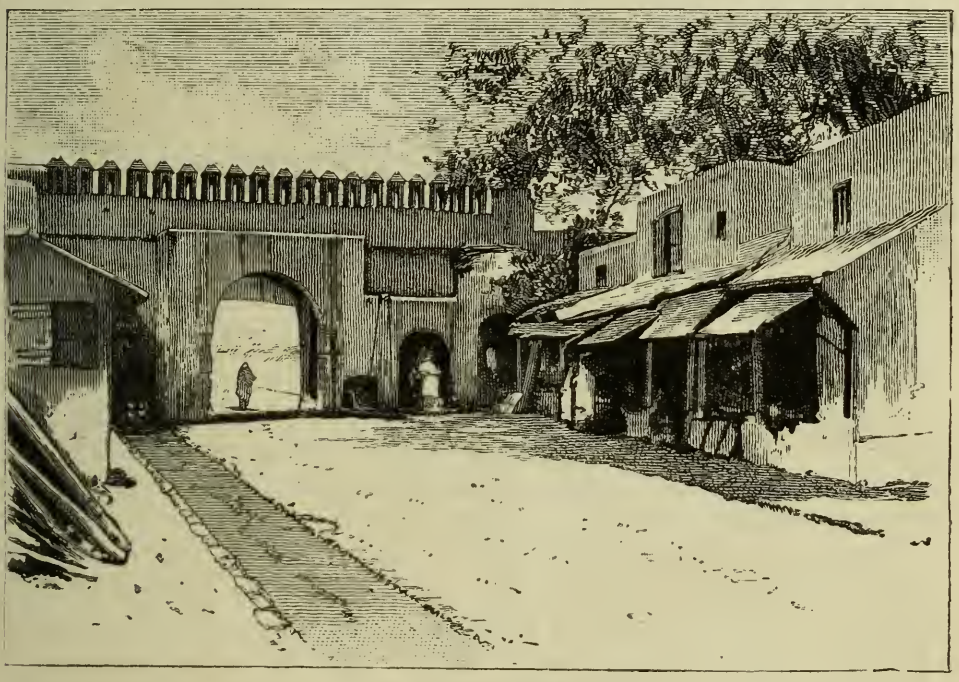
ence in Tangiers? Can there be anything in the air that affects an English constitution?"

"Not that I ever heard of, sir," answered Wiley. "The air's good enough, and if the smells are disagreeable they are not mortal. But

I haven't much faith in that lemon tea. My opinion always has been that it's a kind of narcotic, or drug, that brings on singular delusions until the effect has worn off. For the moment it really very much upsets the health. And when gentlemen take it in large quantities one must expect evil consequences."

"But that's hours ago," I returned. "Surely the effect would have worn off by this time?"

"On the contrary," returned Wiley. "The effects of the drug are slow. I shouldn't wonder if we have some trouble with Mr. Jago and Captain Broadley. I can see fancies coming on as plainly as possible. I assure you, sir, that I've known the most absurd



GATE OF TANGIERS.

delusions arise under the influence of that lemon tea. A good bottle of beer would have done these gentlemen far more service. It's now almost dinner time, and the best thing we can do—if it can be managed—is to get them back to the hotel."

Now seriously alarmed, I suggested our immediate return, for evening was coming on. As we went through the streets, the Moors, squatting on doorsteps or shambling along with their mules, took little notice of us, and we reached the hotel.

At dinner both proving past the stage of eating, I persuaded them to go to bed, established myself as sick-nurse, and kept vigil.

About ten o'clock they had fallen into a fitful doze. The moon had risen, bright and beautiful as ever. A breath of fresh air would help to carry one through the night. I also wanted to see Tangiers by moonlight, to observe the town in a state of quietude. So, turn-

ing the landlord into a temporary watcher, away I went with Wiley for a short stroll.

All was very calm and peaceful. The streets were almost deserted. Here and there a silent Moor, wrapped in his abba, with quick, noiseless tread, flitted along like a ghost, now passing into shadow, and now issuing into light. Half the street was shrouded in darkness, the other stood out in brilliant contrast. Houses were closed and quiet, lights were nearly all extinguished. It looked almost like a city of the dead; the long rows of small, flat houses might have been Pompeian streets of tombs. Up narrow, unfrequented alleys, and even in the main thoroughfares, Moors were lying fast asleep on the bare stones, curled up in their sacks like dormice, not an atom of head or foot visible. A hard bed, truly, to which they seemed indifferent. We stooped over one or two out of curiosity; they never stirred, and might have been so many logs of wood or blocks of marble.

We went up to the citadel. The moon threw her light upon the tranquil waters of the Mediterranean, where myriads of flashes died out and renewed themselves in silence. The hills were outlined against the dark night sky; around us slept the town. The white roofs gleamed flat and cold and distinct in the moonlight; the mosque towers and minarets might have been genii guarding for good or ill. The fair moon herself rolled upwards in splendour, without whose aid nothing of all this could have been visible. Night would have enveloped all in sable wings and profound silence. As it is, on these occasions, the broad sunlight is merely exchanged for a light more soft and beautiful, but almost equally distinct.

We did not stay long, for I was anxious about my charges. The landlord, with the best will in the world, could only possess a partial influence. As we went back through the streets, from a silent doorway there came a solitary ray. What could it be? Some bookworm wasting the midnight oil? for such things might exist in Tangiers, notwithstanding its habits and customs of a thousand years ago. Or was some sad and lonely Moor keeping guard over a sick patient? If so, I felt that I should like to stop and shake hands with him. A fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind.

I turned inquiringly to the guide.

"I believe it's the chemist," said Wiley. "It is just about the right spot for him. He often sits poring over his books until the small hours; sometimes even falls asleep over them. And the next morning there he is, with his head on the counter, his lamp still burning, the house never shut up. Moors can sleep anywhere, anyhow, you know, sir. The harder the bed, the better they like it."

"So it seems," I replied, pointing to a Moor curled up at the foot of a door-step, where the moon shone full upon him. "They must be stiff and cold when they wake in the morning."

"Not at all, sir," returned Wiley. "Habit is second nature. They

get up, give themselves a shake, like a big dog, and are ready to begin their day."

"And how about washing?" I asked.

The guide laughed.

"There's no act of parliament in Morocco which makes washing compulsory," he replied. "Perhaps, sir, the less we enquire into that matter the better."

We had now reached the solitary ray of light. It was, as Wiley had guessed, the chemist's, and streamed through the glass-door. The sage sat at his counter, quietly reading a book that looked large enough and old enough to contain the archives of Tangiers for the last thousand years. The student raised his head, and there was a far-off gaze in his eyes. His aspect was too clever and imposing for a mere dispenser of drugs, altogether devoid of the commonplace and the practical. He ought to have been an astrologer or astronomer; or even a seer—like the magician that dwelt at the bottom of that rose-coloured passage in Granada.

He spoke not a word of English, so Wiley described the symptoms under which my patients were labouring, and which seemed so alarming. What could he recommend?

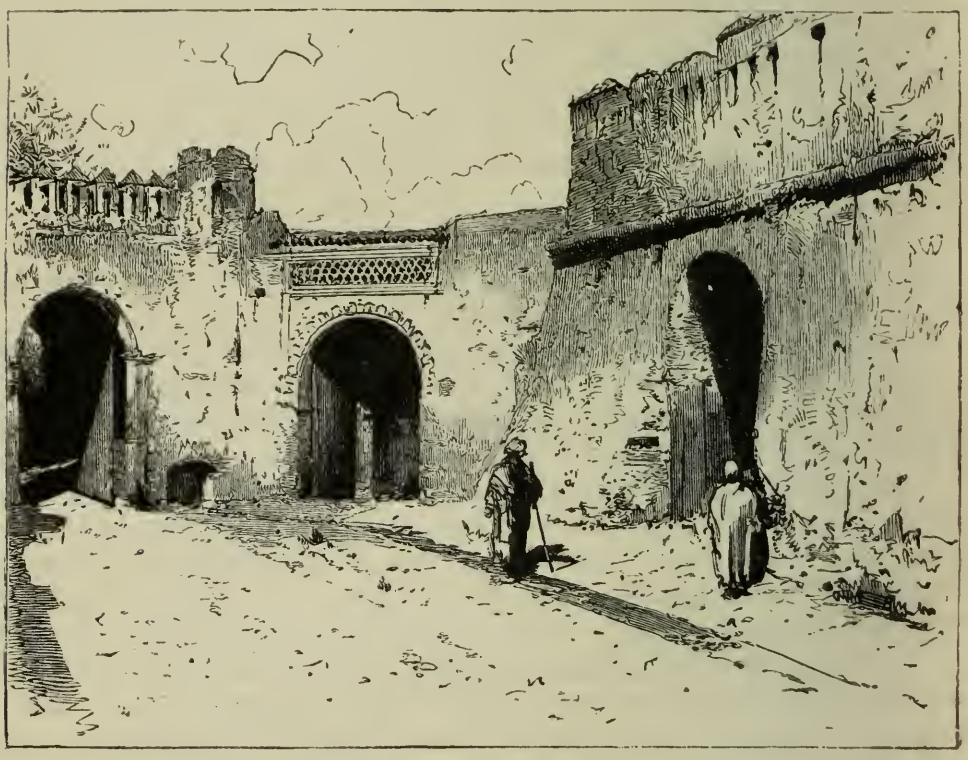
I had little confidence in the look of the chemist. His head was evidently full of his book; he was just as likely to suggest a deadly poison as a remedy. For a moment he plunged into a profound meditation, then muttered: "Turkey rhubarb."

I started in amazement, and Wiley, at my request, again carefully went over all the symptoms: the vacant eyes, the strange hallucinations, the lemon tea. At the mention of the latter the old sage shook his head ominously, yet at every pause continued to mutter "Turkey rhubarb;" until, at last, I could have thrown the whole jar of Turkey rhubarb at his head. Finally, I told him that these cases wanted a soothing treatment, nothing in the shape of irritant or tonic. I begged him to prepare me a bottle of bromide of potassium mixed with a small quantity of chloral, and, armed with this invaluable medicine, we departed. Æsculapius, disturbed in his studies, put out his lamp and went to bed.

I found that my charges had been restless during my absence. The landlord looked flushed with anxiety, and was glad to retire from his post. With much persuasion, I administered a strong dose of bromide and chloral. The effect was magical. In ten minutes both had sunk into a childlike slumber, from which the happiest results might be anticipated. I sent the courier off to bed, and prepared to keep further vigil. They woke at intervals, fancies still upon them; but about three o'clock, when dawn was breaking in the East, and light had begun to spread her wings, they fell into a deep sleep—the result of repeated doses of bromide and chloral—which lasted over four hours. From this they awoke refreshed and restored, looking like interesting convalescents.

After a light breakfast (they positively asked for lemon tea but didn't get it), Broadley felt sufficiently recovered to stroll through the town; whilst Mr. Jago sat in the large square hall or court and contemplated the noisy birds, the daggers, and the Moorish curiosities by which he was surrounded; and interviewed the Moorish merchants, who came and went and tried to persuade him into buying goods that would have tested the combined tonnage of the First Reserve Squadron. But he was proof against their wiles.

When the time came for leaving, we quietly strolled down to the beach and put off in one of the shore boats. The steamer lying



An Old Nook, Tangiers.

a hundred yards or so out in the bay, looked a very pretty object on the broad blue waters. I must say that I left Tangiers with no great reluctance on the one hand, and with grateful emotions on the other. I had gone through a time of tremendous anxiety; the sole responsibility of two invalids had been upon me. If recovery had not proved as rapid as the disease—but I would not pursue the thought. The steamer weighed anchor and the water foamed around us. The shores of Tangiers began to recede. White houses, mosque towers and minarets, looking so Eastern and cool and pure, diminished and faded away. The hills grew faint and shadowy.

"All's well that ends well," I quoted, clasping my friends' hands.

"Yes," murmured Mr. Jago fervently. "I feel that we owe our

lives to you. On returning to the *Defence*, we shall have to present you with an illuminated address, in memory of the occasion."

"Or perhaps," I suggested, "one of Van Stoker's numerous love sonnets might be found to meet the necessity. It would save trouble, and would be full of warmth and sentiment."

"I doubt if Van Stoker would spare one out of the many thousands he has written," returned Mr. Jago;—"even to you. That young man is to me a most interesting psychological study. I shall watch his future career with the greatest interest."

"As for me," returned Broadley, "neither love sonnets nor illuminated addresses could ever express a tithe of my emotions. When I think how nearly we were all three ——"

"Never mind that now," I interrupted, hastily. "Be satisfied, amico mio, that nothing so terrible has happened. We are all safe and sound. The only mystery to me is that I have not been the invalid instead of you. Depend upon it that lemon tea may be good for the Moors, but it is poison to an Englishman. See out there," I added, pointing onwards.

For in the distance we could discern the outlines of the Squadron in Gibraltar Bay. The steamer was making good way. The Rock loomed up and grew in size and majesty. As we neared the ships, it was observed that the *Defence* had a distinct list to starboard. For a moment we felt a flash of alarm.

"What can it be?" cried Mr. Jago.

"I can't conceive," returned Broadley. "Never saw such a thing in the whole course of my existence."

"I have it," said I, under the influence of a bright idea. "Without doubt this is produced by the weight of Van Stoker's love letters." And so, indeed, it proved.

We advanced nearer and nearer. There was a good deal of swell upon the water to-day; so much so that the Regatta, which was to have taken place that morning, had to be deferred; and we were not sorry, presently, to find ourselves at anchor. A boat shot out from the *Defence*, and ere long we were once more pacing the old familiar decks. We did not know it then, but it was the beginning of the end.

MRS. CARR'S COMPANION.

By Mary Grace Wightwick, Author of "In Lands of Palm."

CHAPTER XVI.

THOROLD.

ONE fine morning in March, when trees were budding, and hedges sprouting, and birds beginning to sing again and make pretence at summer, a telegram was handed in at the Archdeacon's door which put all the household in pleasant commotion. Miles was on his way home, had actually left camp and reached Natal, where, if all went well, he was to embark the following morning.

Will Olive ever forget the day of the telegram's arrival? She was returning from a long country walk to a farm-house, where she had been in search of new-laid eggs for her mother, when turning a corner into the Close, she was suddenly accosted by a familiar voice:

"Olive! are you going to cut us?"

Her uncle and John Thorold stood together beneath the great gateway, smiling at her sudden start as she recognised them.

"You are just in time," said the Archdeacon. "Thorold, here, is leaving St. Brenda's for good and all to-morrow morning, and wants to bid you good-bye. He has just been paying us a farewell visit."

"I leave for Canada by the next mail," Thorold explained, as Olive mechanically held out her hand. "I came back expressly to see my friends, and should indeed have been vexed to miss you."

"Yes?" Olive could not trust herself to utter another word. The blow had fallen so suddenly, so cruelly. She had not seen him since the evening of that terrible wedding-day, and now this, their first meeting, was also to be their last!

The Archdeacon began openly lamenting his protégé's departure. He had taken a liking for Thorold, and was sincere in his regrets, to which the young man listened half-absently. One word from Olive would have been worth all the rest, but it did not come. She stood cold and silent, with lips firmly pressed together. But for her extreme paleness one might have thought she had not heard.

"I was so sorry not to see Lady Mary," Thorold said; "will you bid her good-bye for me, and thank her for all her kindness?"

Olive silently accepted the commission.

"She will be very sorry herself," the Archdeacon struck in. "Lady Mary has a good memory for all her friends. Return whenever you will, she will have a welcome for you."

"And you," Thorold said, diffidently approaching Olive, "shall

you also be glad to see me back again? if, indeed, I ever do come back!"

"Of course." With a last remaining effort at self-command she nerved herself to utter the words, though she dared not meet his gaze. He sighed as his eyes rested this once more upon the face that had grown so unutterably dear to him; yes, he would own it now—dearer than anything in this world besides. If things had been different, would it have been so difficult to win it to loving looks and tender smiles in place of that passionless calm? As it was—he recollected himself and held out his hand.

"Good-bye—Olive!"

"Good-bye."

That was all. A farewell hand-clasp, one glance, and she had passed on, out of his life.

Blinded by tears that would no longer be kept back, Olive stumbled on, she scarcely knew whither, till suddenly seized by a dread of meeting someone she knew, she turned aside towards a spot in the cloisters where she had often sat sketching with Thorold. Peace, if not content, might be found where so many once restless hearts lay sleeping under the cold grey stones.

Great waves of melodious sound surged into hearing now and again from the organ within the building close by. Olive's sad heart echoed the De Profundis of the faintly-chanting voices. Suddenly, footsteps sounded behind her, growing more and more distinct in pursuit, till they slackened at her side. How much one footstep differs from another! Olive would have known these among a thousand; her heart began to throb wildly, and her limbs to tremble.

"Miss Egerton, I came to ask—it cannot matter now that I am going away, perhaps for ever!—will you give me one of your sketches as a remembrance?—What! Tears! Dare I believe that my going costs you one little pang of regret? Ah! if you would only give me the happiness of knowing that you will miss me when I am no longer here! You don't know what it would be to me!"

She had started guiltily at the sound of the voice which she had thought never to hear again, and struggled to control herself; but the traces of tears were only too evident in the face she raised to his; and, when at last she managed to speak, her smile was a poor pretence.

"Are you so glad that I am sorry, John? That is not like you!"

The tender reproach, the half-admission, was enough. A mist seemed to clear away all in a moment. Thorold forgot all about "Lady Mary Egerton's daughter," and "the gulf," and his pride, and what he had meant to do, and what he hadn't. He only realised with a great gladness that his old playmate cared for him, and that he had found it out just in time.

He dared to speak now in the brief, blunt words which told more than the highest flights of eloquence; and Olive listened to what she

could never grow tired of hearing, though she knew it all very well before. What a change had been wrought in a few brief, blessed moments, while the organ still pealed on! Only now the notes swelled out into a sweet strain of triumph, giving laughter for tears, and joy for bitterness.

"And you say I never made you so happy as when you found me miserable?" said Olive, reproachfully.

"Indeed, no. As someone says somewhere:

'Give smiles to those who love you less,
But give your tears to me.'

That is when you *must* shed them. Ah, Olive! what a sacrifice you are going to make for me! To go into exile! To leave home and friends for my sake!"

"No, John. Wherever you are will be home to me now." For whatever it might cost her she knew by this time that no sacrifice could ever be one-hundredth part so painful as that final handclasp which had seemed to tear her very heart-strings when she thought she had bidden her old playmate good-bye for ever!

Thorold could not thank her as he would have liked to do. It was a dreadfully public place. The Dean might have popped out of his house upon them at any moment; he was always prowling about the ruins; or one of the old canons, whose courting days were long ago over, or a stray tourist, to say nothing of Mrs. Warburton, or some other St. Brenda gossip. But as they strolled on slowly side by side, they could exchange looks—and they did; and hand-clasps—and they did; right under the dilapidated noses of the weather-beaten corbels, looking down on them with stony, impassive faces.

"My mother must not be excited, or she will lose her night's rest; we will tell no one to-night," said Olive, hugging herself in the consciousness of her happy secret.

"Ah! I see you want one more peaceful evening to yourself before the regrets, and warnings, and condolences begin. But surely I may speak to the Archdeacon?"

"Not till the very last thing after we are all gone upstairs."

"And I must come the very first thing in the morning to make sure you have not changed your mind? My train goes at eleven; we have so little time together!"

"And so much to say! Come as early as you like—I am always down by eight."

It was very little after that hour when Mr. Thorold was ushered into the familiar room opening on to the conservatory, where stood a slender figure, with head bent down, over the blossoms which apparently engrossed her. Fortunately there were only the flowers looking on to witness how he greeted it.

As it was, a fuschia near seemed to droop its graceful bells still lower, while some ruby camelia-blossoms which had only just

opened, and so were unaccustomed to such sights, blushed an even rosier red.

"And so you have not changed your mind," said Thorold, as he released her.

"I think you might have asked that question first, John!"

Her smile, a chastened one, for she could not but remember that this grey morning was already dimmed by the shadow of his going away—ought to have been sufficient answer. But as if loth to believe in his good fortune, he went on seriously: "You are sure you have no doubts? Olive! if you were ever to treat me as your sister treated Kane—if I were even to see a shadow of regret in your eyes—it would break my heart! Rather put me to pain now; I can bear it."

She did not falter beneath his earnest gaze, but raised her eyes to his with such a world of mute reproach in them that he grew ashamed of his mistrust.

"Rose is Rose, and I am Olive," she said quietly, and then disengaging her hands from his clasp, she walked back into the drawing-room.

"Forgive me, dearest; I should have known you better," he said humbly. Then she made room for him on the ottoman beside her, and for a while they forgot the flight of time, the waiting breakfast—all but themselves.

Yet there was one thing Olive could not forget—their impending separation. How long it might be before she would again feel that strong arm round her! the arm which had so often been her protection in childish troubles long ago; how long before those kind, faithful eyes would again look down upon her tenderly. The unfeeling marble clock upon the mantel-shelf ticked on inexorably; the moments were fleeting so fast, so fast! But the tender sadness on her face found no reflexion in her lover's, although it was soberly enough that Thorold presently said:

"Dear Olive! I have much to thank Heaven for, this day. The post this morning brings me news that the judges have selected my designs for the new Government buildings. I need not now return to Canada at all. Olive!" he spoke playfully though half sadly, "you may have cause to be proud of your husband yet!"

The flush of mingled shame and triumph—the triumph for him, the shame all for herself—had not faded from her expressive face when the door opened and the Archdeacon came in, rubbing his hands. He seemed not altogether surprised at the presence of the early visitor. Assyriology and cuneiform records had not perhaps quite banished the remembrance of some early passages which—which I suppose many veteran archdeacons count among the records of their lives. Olive had always been his favourite niece, and his kiss for her was especially kind that morning as he said playfully:

"Olive, the kettle has been boiling over, your mother and I are famished, and Viola is hunting for you all over the house!"

It was certainly more by good luck than good guiding that the breakfast got itself prepared. As it was, the Archdeacon swallowed, without a murmur, a double portion of sugar in his tea, while Thorold drank his coffee sugarless without even discovering the fact. There was sweetness enough in his cup that morning.

Only Lady Mary's meal was entirely satisfactory, being carefully arranged by Viola (who, alas! had no lover at hand to distract her thoughts), and eaten in the seclusion of her own room, apart from the bouleversement of idea which disturbed the others' serenity.

Lady Mary had had time to arrange herself leisurely in the handsome morning wrapper which dignified her convalescence, before a knock at the door announced Olive; Olive roused out of her usual calm to a flutter of nervous tremblings and blushings, which sat well upon her. She came behind her mother's chair and tenderly kissed the broad, fair brow, then waited in silence.

"Well, Olive, what is it? I see you have something to say to me."

"Mamma, Mr. Thorold came here this morning."

"Yes? I thought he was going—or gone."

"He has asked me to be his wife."

"And go to Canada!"

"No; his work lies in England for the future, for he is chosen architect of the new Government buildings."

"And what was your answer, Olive?"

"Mamma! what could I say but 'Yes!'" came the confession, with averted face.

Lady Mary felt a strange dryness in her throat, and for a moment found a difficulty in swallowing. She paused to smooth back the lace of her wrapper before she spoke again, and in the pause the last and proudest of her castles in the air came tumbling in ruins about her.

"Come here, Olive, where I can see you."

She obeyed, and coming, knelt silently beside her mother.

A glance at the happy, blushing, upturned face told Lady Mary all she needed to know. She took it between her hands caressingly, and smiled, and sighed.

"Ah, well! It is not what I once hoped, but I always liked him; that is one comfort. And I see how it is with you, Olive."

"Mother, he is so good, so noble—has borne so patiently with all my folly and perversity! Oh, I don't deserve to be so happy!"

If her mother and uncle were less happy than Olive herself in the prospect before her, they did not distress her with impotent regrets. When she had endured with what patience she might one of Mrs. Carr's philippics, setting forth the folly of preferring an obscure architect to an eligible like Theodore Raleigh (she happened to be in one of her bitter moods), and when she had perused a severe remonstrance, filling two sheets of letter-paper, penned by her uncle, Lord

Castlemaine, the worst consequences of Olive's unwise choice seemed over for the present. Olive had been left to bear the brunt of the general dissatisfaction alone, for Thorold could not postpone his business in town, and the morning express had carried him off as arranged.

While he was away that first afternoon, Olive did the very sweetest thing possible, for which Miss Hammond always loved her. She walked across the Close to the Minor Canon's house, which she had never entered since the evening of her uncomfortable visit to Viola, and herself broke to John's aunt the astounding news of her engagement, with an air of grace and dignity which won the old lady's heart at once.

"I wish I had never believed a word against her! I never shall again!" cried Olive's newly-won champion, with honest enthusiasm. "Of course such admiration as she has had is a great trial—yes, we all know that. I dare say we should have been just as proud in her place. Oh, yes, no doubt we should!" cried the kind little woman, with ready excuses. "But I must say Miss Egerton is not one bit spoiled, and John is a very lucky man!"

"Not a doubt of it, Miss Hammond."

It was Mrs. Warburton who spoke, for the conversation was taking place in the pause for tea at one of the sociable little gatherings, with a view to Dorcas work, which Miss Hammond held periodically. "Intimately connected as I am with the dear Egertons," pursued Mrs. Warburton, "I speak with authority when I assure you that your nephew is most fortunate. But for that unhappy fiasco about the Kane marriage, he might have had more difficulty in his wooing. I understand the affair was a terrible blow to Lady Mary—she will scarcely hold her head so high again. Some people say it was a judgment on her for her pride; but we must not be uncharitable."

"Certainly not, Mrs. Warburton. Those who know Lady Mary will respect her all the more for the patient way in which she has borne her misfortunes," said Mrs. Warburton's hostess indignantly.

"Perhaps so." Mrs. Warburton shrugged her shoulders. "But if her pride is not humbled, it ought to be. I should not care for one of *my* daughters to be made the public talk like Rose Egerton."

"Indeed I hope they never will," put in Mrs. Bythesea, with a little smile that would have been pronounced malicious in anyone less good-natured.

"I hear Colonel Kane has vowed never to speak to one of the family again," ventured a near neighbour of Mrs. Warburton's, perhaps on that lady's authority, for the Egerton affair had been often discussed between them.

"That I can contradict," said Miss Hammond, still ruffled. "Colonel Kane has called several times to enquire for Lady Mary.

"And, oh, dear! I am afraid we are beginning to gossip. I really think we had better say no more about it. Perhaps Mrs. Bythesea will be kind enough to read us a little more about 'England's Royal Home.' I am sure we shall all like that."

CHAPTER XVII.

HOME.

Lady Mary was growing stronger and better every day, yet she still clung to the seclusion of her own room, and showed a strange reluctance to mix with the world again—her world whose sympathetic speech or significant silence would alike be a trial. But there was one inevitable ordeal which must be gone through—the first interview with Mrs. Carr, and the time came when it could no longer be put off. Poor Lady Mary made up her mind to the effort, and one morning when Olive came into her room after breakfast, she said, with a faint attempt at cheerfulness: "I feel better than usual to-day, Olive. I think I will go and see your aunt presently."

"Are you sure you are equal to it, mother dear?" Olive asked, anxiously. Both were conscious of a feeling that the interview must needs be a trying one.

"Yes; I shall not stay long. And you must come with me, Olive," said Lady Mary, with a weary sigh.

So at noon the visit was made in semi-regal fashion, Olive announcing it beforehand with some ceremony, and then returning to escort her mother, who looked queenly and stately as ever in her grey morning négligé. But Mrs. Carr could not but perceive the lines which mental suffering had traced upon the placid face since she had last seen it, and subdued for the moment by the dignity of grief, her greeting was given in a gentler tone than of old. If the wind had not been in the east, and if the talk could have been kept to indifferent topics there might have been little to complain of, but the discussion of home affairs was inevitable sooner or later, and presently it came.

"Well, Mary, this is a pretty piece of business! I am not surprised you should look so old and worn. It certainly is not pleasant to have the Egerton name dragged through the mire, and the Egerton doings in everyone's mouth, from baker boys to dressmakers' apprentices."

Poor Lady Mary sighed.

Mrs. Carr continued, deaf to the appeal to her generosity made by her sister-in-law's pale face and quivering lip.

"I always expected something of the kind; and now, forsooth, Olive must needs make us another nine-days' wonder by marrying an insignificant person that neither you nor I would have looked at in our day, Mary! I suppose he is what people call a 'rough

diamond,' though why a man must needs be a diamond because he is rough, I never can understand!"

"Aunt Charlotte, you mistake," Olive began indignantly.

"There, there, don't excite yourself, child," her aunt interposed quickly. "Perhaps under the circumstances you could not be expected to do better for yourself. It is not everyone who would care now to be connected with—" Olive started up, regardless of the restraining hand Lady Mary laid upon her arm, as she turned upon her a look of appeal, which seemed to say like the Mexican chief upon the rack to his companion in torture: "Am *I* upon a bed of roses?" Her patience had come to an end, and with an abrupt "Excuse me, mother," she hurried from the room.

Lady Mary sank back in her chair. She was at her sister-in-law's mercy, and could only endure in silence the re-opening of wounds that were still smarting.

Olive rushed tumultuously up and down steps, and along passages, to Viola's room, and began, white with indignation: "I can bear no more, Viola; pray go and rescue mamma from Aunt Charlotte's clutches. She is enough to drive one wild! Don't lose a moment. They are alone together."

Meantime, Lady Mary, left defenceless, was making a desperate effort to turn the conversation on pleasanter subjects, and spoke of Miles. For a moment her sister-in-law's eyes lost their cynical expression.

"Miles! Ah! we are all proud of Miles! I trust he may come back safe, though one can never tell when these cases may take a bad turn." Mrs. Carr's ominous shake of the head sent a pang to the mother's heart, but she tried to shake off the impression, and roused herself to say cheerfully:

"Come, Charlotte, we must hope for the best."

"Yes; there is no harm in that. I have nothing to say against Miles. He is a good fellow, though I shall always maintain not one bit too good for Viola Keith, or Viola Romayne, as I suppose everyone will have to call her now."

The malicious twinkle in Mrs. Carr's eyes was not needed to point the shaft under which Lady Mary visibly writhed.

"She will be called Viola Egerton, I fancy, as soon as Miles can manage it," said Lady Mary, with a faint smile.

"Ah! the wounded hero must have his way, of course. And you have had to give in after all. Another of your mistakes, Mary! But of course, even the wisest of us can't be infallible in our judgment."

Here the curtain was pushed aside, and Viola came quickly up to them, never more welcome, to one at least of the pair.

"Dear Lady Mary! how glad I am to see you out of your room at last!"

"And how glad I shall be to find myself back in it!" murmured Lady Mary, as she rose with scarcely concealed impatience. "Viola,

give me your arm. Mrs. Carr and I are both tired, and it is nearly luncheon time. Good-bye, Charlotte."

"Good-bye, Mary. Thanks for your visit. I hope it will do you no harm. After all," she finished consolingly, "perhaps it is more comfortable to have found out that all one's swans are geese; then, at least, one knows what to expect of them!"

Lady Mary tightened her grasp of Viola's arm, and silently, with compressed lips and head erect, walked back to her room. Viola drew forward the large easy chair, and settled her comfortably in it. As she came behind and arranged the pillows, Lady Mary looked up with a pathetic, wearied face, whose silent anguish Viola could well interpret. She bent down tenderly, and pressed her lips to Lady Mary's pale cheek, with a lingering touch which would fain have kissed away the pain. These mute caresses of hers were more appreciated than any words could be.

Lady Mary's eyes slowly filled with tears. She was feeble as yet, and not herself.

"My dear child! when I think of the hours you have spent in those rooms! the daily vexations ——"

"One gets accustomed to it," said Viola, brightly, interrupting her. "It has done me no harm, and taught me patience. And now, while you rest, I am going back to try and talk Mrs. Carr into a pleasanter frame of mind."

For even Viola was, for once, wrought up to a pitch of indignation which emboldened her to tell Mrs. Carr how much her unkind remarks had wounded Olive's feelings. At last, having persuaded her to make some sort of amende, she went back triumphant to her friend.

"Olive, Mrs. Carr asked me to tell you that she is sorry if she said anything to vex you just now."

"If!" exclaimed Olive, still indignant.

"Indeed, I think you had better forget about it. You see, an easterly wind is trying to most people, and ——"

"You are a capital peacemaker, Viola, and mean well, but I know quite well who pulled the wires to make my aunt send a civil message. And now, I should like to know exactly what she *did* say!"

"Just what I told you, dear; you don't think I would have invented it!"

"And what besides?"

"Oh! nothing particular."

"Viola, I insist upon hearing."

"Well, if you will have it, she said—she said ——" A gleam of mirth dawned in Viola's eyes, and an irrepressible smile parted her lips. "Oh! Olive, don't be angry! She said she daresayed the young man was no worse than '*others of his class*,' and if you liked to take him up and introduce him, she would do her best to be civil to him!"

It was only a few days after this that the even tenor of life under the Archdeacon's roof was interrupted by Viola's announcement of her intention of leaving St. Brenda's.

If the Dean and Chapter in a body had suddenly proposed taking their departure, the suggestion could not have roused more opposition in Lady Mary's breast.

"Going away! What are you dreaming of, Viola! Going away when Miles is already homeward bound, and every day, please Heaven! brings him nearer to us! Are you tired of us, and of St. Brenda's, pray?"

"Neither, dear Lady Mary. You know I should never leave you from choice, but—but——" blushing hotly—"I don't wish to be here when Captain Egerton returns."

It was noteworthy that Lady Mary's son, who, during the weeks of their distress and anxiety had been always "Miles" with Viola, was now transformed into "Captain Egerton," and spoken of with formal respect.

"My dear child, don't you understand that I have withdrawn all objection to your engagement? Miles could not bring me a daughter whom I could love more dearly—for her own sake!"

Lady Mary's honesty prompted the conclusion, and the half-sigh which accompanied it.

"You are very good"—Viola returned the pressure of the hand which held hers—"but—I must go. Do you forget that your son is absolutely free? He may have changed his mind."

"You think it likely?"

The hot colour mounted once more in Viola's face. "No, I don't. But," with some spirit, "I will not stay here to be thrust upon him whether he will or no."

"And where may Your Independence think of going to?" enquired Lady Mary.

"To my old governess in Bloomsbury, where I was staying before I came here. I have written to say I will be with her on Tuesday week—if that will suit you, Lady Mary?"

"Of course it will not suit me to lose you, but a wilful woman must have her way."

Time sped swiftly, while the *Argyll* was riding the high seas bringing their wounded hero, as they hoped, day by day nearer to them and convalescence. Thorold undertook to meet him at Southampton. The Archdeacon was glad to be spared the journey, and Lady Mary was not yet equal to so much fatigue and excitement.

Viola's spirits sank to zero as the day for her departure approached, but no persuasion would induce her to delay it. Even the very last evening Lady Mary once more tried to shake her resolution as they sat in the fire-light after dinner, depressed and melancholy under the shadow of the approaching separation.

But Viola was firm.

"No, dear Lady Mary, to-morrow is the utmost limit. I would not have waited till then but that I want to be with you as long as possible, and it is clear that the *Argyll* cannot arrive before Thursday at earliest."

"So John Thorold says, though I fancy the passage has sometimes been made more quickly."

"But not at this time of year," said Olive, "although I wish I could think so. These last few days of waiting have seemed interminable!"

Perhaps Viola thought so too, though she said nothing. Only turning to Olive, she presently said gently: "Olive, I have been intending to ask you—will you send me a telegram directly you hear of the ship's arrival? I shall be anxious to hear of it as soon as possible."

"Oh! you take so much interest at least!" said Lady Mary, with pleasant irony.

Viola gave her a deprecating look, which seemed to beseech her forbearance. Indeed she was in no spirits for teasing. Although she would not for worlds have remained for Miles to find her at St. Brenda's, it cost her dear to leave the place on the very eve of his return.

"I wonder there was no letter from John this morning," said Lady Mary, presently. "I hoped that he might have heard which day the *Argyll* was expected."

"Perhaps it has not even reached Madeira yet," suggested Olive.

While they were still discussing the well-worn subject, and Viola was once more demonstrating that it was impossible to hope for the traveller's return before Thursday, there came a sound of approaching carriage wheels, and a ring at the bell.

"How tiresome!" sighed Olive. "An interruption on our last evening together. I am not in the humour for visitors." Then, after a few minutes' pause, which allowed the front door to be opened: "Surely that is not John's voice! Oh, what can have happened!"

Lady Mary started to her feet pale and trembling. Viola came to her side and clasped her hand with an instinctive childlike action. Whatever was to come they could bear it best so, together.

Olive darted out into the midst of the commotion in the hall. It was John indeed. In a moment more the door was thrown wide open, and Olive, roused out of her usual calm, appeared ushering him in, while, supported upon his arm, leaned a tall slight figure wrapped in plaid and overcoat. There was a stifled cry. "Miles! my boy!" Lady Mary was sobbing on her son's neck. Viola shrank back into the shadow of the curtain. Her limbs trembled, almost refusing to support her now that the supreme moment had come. Every sensation seemed paralysed.

But the flickering fire-light found her out in her hiding-place.

Miles, too, releasing his mother and looking round with the eager gaze she knew so well, descried the shrinking figure in the background.

"Yes, here she is; but you are only just in time," said Lady Mary, playfully.

She put out her hand, and drew Viola forward, with a little touch of unconscious solemnity in the act. And then there was no more hesitation. Miles made one step. His right arm still hung helpless in its sling, but the other sufficed to clasp her closely to him in a caress of unspeakable tenderness, and, without more words, Viola understood that her perplexities were all at an end, and her fate decided.

Miles, in day-dreams during his months of exile, had often pictured to himself that peaceful hearth, with the soft shine of fire and candle-light falling upon the familiar home-faces; perhaps, with the hopefulness of a boyish nature, he had sometimes even imagined the circle widened out to take in

> "A nearer one
> Still, and a dearer one
> Yet, than all other."

And now, behold! the wild, venturesome fancies realised at last!

The traveller's return, so much sooner than expected, was owing to no plot of Thorold's—as Viola in her secret heart at first believed—but simply to the good fortune of a favourable passage.

"I gave you the utmost limit," said Thorold, answering her accusing look, "for I knew you would all be waiting, and watching, and tormenting yourselves over every hour's delay, and when I heard early this morning that the *Argyll* was in sight, it seemed better to announce its arrival ourselves, and enjoy the pleasure of your surprise. You forgive me, don't you, Viola?"

Viola, with a hand held fast in Miles's, and a great load of doubt and pain lifted from her heart, smiled him a re-assuring answer.

"Ah, yes! You have not heard that story yet, Miles! You don't know that Viola proposed giving you the fatigue of a trip to Town in search of her. Indeed, her trunks are probably packed, and her labels written at this moment! Perhaps she will go all the same; she is very independent!"

Viola's gentle, "Please don't, Lady Mary!" was drowned in Miles's hearty:

"No, that she won't. She came here to please herself, as Mrs. Carr's Companion; she shall remain to please me—as mine!"

THE END.

ON THE RIVER.

By Lady Dunboyne.

"SO Vane is at his old tricks again! If I were that girl's father, or brother, I should be inclined to express my opinion of his tactics pretty strongly!"

"Is that Miss Elliot? I have noticed him by her side more than half the evening—but, if I may judge from the lady's expression, his attentions are not otherwise than acceptable."

"Splendidly handsome girl, isn't she? Alice Hargreaves, the new beauty, is not a patch upon her, in my opinion."

"Handsome enough—for those who admire that style—great eastern eyes, and Juno-like figure. For my own part, I prefer something softer and more feminine."

"So apparently did Vane yesterday morning. He was sitting in the park, under Mrs. Fairfax's parasol, for over an hour and a half. How a proud girl like Blanche Elliot can stand such open rivalry passes my comprehension."

"Mrs. Fairfax? The widow of Jack Fairfax, of the Artillery?"

"Even so—Nina Forrester, that was. You must remember her, Grahame—a pretty little fair-haired thing, who looks as if a puff of wind would blow her away. She is awfully well off—Jack took care of that, poor old chap! And really she looks hardly more than a child still, though she has a little girl, as pretty as herself, over five years old."

"And she is flirting with young Vane, you say?"

"Flirting! She's the veriest little flirt in England. Her villa at Twickenham is a paradise for that kind of amusement. Sloping lawn down to the river—boat always ready—strawberries and cream—and a pretty little hostess *so* charmed to see you if you run down for a breath of fresh air on a hot afternoon. She has been up in town this week, staying with her brother, but was to go home yesterday."

During this last speech, Colonel Grahame's attention has apparently been chiefly bestowed upon Miss Elliot, and the countenance of the man who is so assiduously bending over her.

It is a very good-looking face—a face which one of Sir Reginald Vane's dog-loving friends has sometimes likened to a Gordon setter, with dark lustrous eyes and delicate profile—and if there are weak lines marring the mouth and chin, they are concealed by the black silky moustache and beard which cover both. He is a popular man, especially with women, who easily learn to call him "Reggie," and smile over the rather free-and-easy compliments, which have a

charm of their own when uttered in that low musical murmur. In fact, a drawing-room pet of the nineteenth century, such as one meets with here and there in the course of every season.

Of a very different type is Leslie Grahame, the man who, standing in the doorway, has been listening to the careless remarks of a gossiping acquaintance. Of Scottish descent, and with the rugged cast of features common to that nation, he might, except for his commanding height, pass unnoticed in the crowd assembled at Lady Hetherington's At Home. But probably, on an Aldershot field-day, a spectator would pick out the cavalry officer who sits his horse so gallantly (though three fingers of his bridle-hand are gone, and he is fain to wind the charger's reins round his wrist) as an object of curiosity.

For do not other medals, besides those so lately won in Egypt, decorate his breast: and is there not some tale of heroism and danger, almost unparalleled in modern annals, connected with the Cross earned at Ulundi?

Blanche Elliot, keen-witted in reading countenances, has singled him out this evening, and appeals to Vane with a half-conscious laugh.

"Pray who is that stern-looking man leaning against the door? He appears to take an interest in me—this is the second time I have caught him gazing this way."

"Is that so remarkable? I should have thought the occurrence too frequent and natural to attract your attention—although it *is* rather wonderful for Colonel Grahame to condescend to notice anyone. His head is usually in the clouds."

"He looks out of place here—and feels it. See, he is 'sloping off,' as you say. Grahame—I remember the name—a V.C., is he not?"

"Just so. A great hero in his way, but not a very amusing companion in ordinary life. I only know him by sight however. But tell me once more: when and where am I to see you again?"

Miss Elliot is playing with her fan, and contrives with it to hide the colour that for a moment overspreads her face at this question.

As she remains silent, he repeats it more eagerly.

"You know my hours—I always ride in the evening during this hot weather—six to eight. I shall probably do so to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" Vane's handsome face betrays evident disturbance. "I am afraid I shall be out of town. Very provoking—an old engagement with a relation."

"Why stoop to prevarication, Sir Reginald?" Blanche has risen now, and her dark eyes are flashing. "You are your own master.—See, mamma is beckoning to me. Good night.—You will find it cool and pleasant on the river to-morrow." And with this parting shot she is gone; leaving Vane, looking decidedly foolish, and what is worse, unpleasantly conscious that he is looking so.

"By George!" he soliloquises, as he lights a cigar during his

midnight walk to his club. "How savage she can look when she pleases! Yet I don't know but that I admire her all the more—a flare-up shows off those magnificent eyes, and the very fact of jealousy betrays an interest in my movements. Still the widow is decidedly pretty—and I have been down on my luck lately, and sadly need a windfall. And I really believe she is fond of me, dear little soul."

And Sir Reginald Vane's reflections, not leading him to any satisfactory conclusion, the next afternoon finds him at Waterloo, taking a return ticket to Twickenham.

Five minutes' walk from the latter station brings him to a charming little villa, with green lawn sloping down to the river; while from beneath a weeping-ash, a dainty little figure, emerging from the depths of a chaise longue, comes with hand extended to meet him.

In her cool white summer draperies, and with the flickering sunbeams lighting up her great childish blue eyes and waves of pale gold hair, Mrs. Fairfax is as pleasant an object on a blazing July day as any man's eye could wish to rest upon. So Reggie Vane thinks, as, with a sigh and murmur of satisfaction, he sinks into a seat by her side, takes off his hat, and helps himself uninvited from the fragrant pile of strawberries in the basket near at hand.

"Frightfully hot in London, is not it?" asks his hostess, sympathetically. "Even here, Queenie and I have been able to do nothing but lounge about in the shade and eat strawberries. Where is the child, by-the-bye?"

A tiny counterpart of herself, giving promise of even greater beauty, here comes up, and presents a little hand to Vane; but when he attempts to kiss her, she shakes her yellow curls over her face and struggles away.

"Why, Queenie, what have I done?" he asks, half-offended, yet too languid to go in pursuit of the baby coquette.

The mother's silvery laugh rings out merrily. "You forgot to take away the rose she gave you when you were last here. Never mind, Queenie, you must forgive him now."

"And won't you bring me another in token of pardon?" as the rose-bud mouth meets his half-reluctantly. Queenie hesitates, but is finally conquered by that winning voice and smile, and goes off in quest of the desired gift.

"And now, monsieur," says the little woman, leaning back on her cushions, and surveying her visitor through the large innocent blue eyes, "how has the world been treating you since we last met? Come, give an account of yourself. Where were you last night?"

"Dined at the St. Elmos'. Stupid affair, and intolerably hot—and no one worth speaking to."

"Miss Elliot was not there?" This in a careless little tone of enquiry.

"No. I took in one of the girls of the house, who had not two words to say for herself."

"And so left the field open for your eloquence! Come, Reggie, don't be cross; take some more strawberries. I want you to amuse me now you *are* here. Where did you go afterwards?"

"To a couple of stupid crushes—really a barbarous institution in this weather. Lady Hetherington's rooms were tolerably cool, however."

"And you enjoyed yourself there? It is hardly like you to honour an evening rout when there is no dancing—unless some special attraction tempted you."

"And how could that be, when you were at Twickenham?"

"Well meant, my friend, but hardly so gracefully expressed as I should have expected from you. Queenie, darling, run in and ask why they don't bring tea."

"Here it comes—and—confound it!—another visitor. Why cannot that butler of yours learn discretion?"

"Because I prefer to exercise my own," replies Mrs. Fairfax. And the little figure is drawn up, and the baby-face takes an expression for a moment which warns Vane he has gone too far.

"Who would have thought," he murmurs into his beard, "that the little pussy cat could show such claws?"

Meanwhile Mrs. Fairfax has risen and moved forward to receive her new guest. The servant mumbles a name which she does not catch, and she lifts her pretty appealing eyes in some perplexity to the stranger's face.

Something she reads in that grave bronzed countenance that brings back old memories—recalling a time long passed away, before poor Jack Fairfax won her with his hasty impetuous tale of love—before she had, as it were, leapt suddenly from childhood into the glare and excitement of a spoiled beauty's life. Nor is the dream dispelled when the visitor speaks, unconsciously softening his deep tones with the gentleness he would have used in addressing a child.

"You have forgotten me, Mrs. Fairfax? I do not wonder—it is years since we met—and ——"

"No, no," she suddenly cried, with a joyous clap of her hands. "You are Captain Grahame—my playfellow of long ago. I remember you quite well now; but so much has happened since those days ——"

"I know," he answers gently, wondering whether the shadow in her blue eyes is caused by Jack's memory, or—as he looks at the handsome young fellow so evidently at home in this garden—by Jack's chosen successor. And then the two men glare at one another, after the fashion common to Englishmen when they meet for the first time, and are uncertain whether to be on friendly terms or fly at each other's throats.

"Sir Reginald Vane—Captain—no, it is Colonel now, surely? I thought so—Colonel Grahame." And while a stiff bow is exchanged, she proceeds to pour out the tea.

Vane renews his attentions to Queenie, but she, from some perverse instinct of coquetry, bestows all her favours upon the Colonel, whose grave aspect would hardly prove attractive to children in general. Yet it melts into a kindly smile, as, lifting the little one on his knee, he glances from her face to that of the mother, older only by some eighteen years, and recalls the days when Nina Forrester had sat as confidingly on the knee of the shy young cornet.

"You will let me scull you up the river, Mrs. Fairfax?" says Vane, as he puts down his tea-cup. "I have not forgotten" (here his voice takes a more tender inflexion) "our last expedition to Hampton Court."

Mrs. Fairfax looks doubtfully towards her other guest, who somewhat stiffly observes: "Don't let me be any hindrance to your plans. Or perhaps you will allow me to take an oar in your service."

Vane's face darkens, but the widow claps her hands and answers gaily: "Capital! It would really have been hard work for *one* alone in this heat."

So Queenie runs to fetch her mother's hat, but at the last moment finds the charms of a favourite kitten's society irresistible, and elects to remain on terra firma herself.

Vane pulls stroke, and the boat glides smoothly away from the emerald bank, and out into the glassy expanse of water, amid scores of others gaily laden with a similar freight, and looking as if playing their part in some holiday scene.

"This has been very hard on me," murmurs Vane, bending forward, so that his words are audible to the fair steerer only. "My pleasant afternoon all spoiled, because ——"

"Because you are a foolish, self-willed boy," answers the little woman, who, albeit some four years his junior, sometimes likes to play at maternal airs. "Come, shake off your fit of the blues! be agreeable, and stay and dine with us."

"With *us?* Are you going" (very low) "to invite that fellow too?"

"Certainly I am. He is one of my very oldest friends"—("old enough!" grumbles Vane)—"and I have not seen him for years. We have *heaps* of things to say to one another."

"Then you will certainly get through them better uninterrupted," says Sir Reginald, in a spiteful sotto voce. Then aloud: "I am awfully sorry, Mrs. Fairfax, but I have just remembered that I have to dine out to-night. I am afraid I must ask you to land me at Surbiton, so that I can get home by train. Steer more to the right, please; you are running us into that barge."

"What, are you growing nervous?" and again that sweet clear laugh rings out, and Vane grinds his teeth as he feels, rather than sees, that a grim smile is overspreading the face behind him.

When Surbiton is reached at length, he scarcely attempts to disguise his relief, as he springs ashore.

"Good-bye! Many thanks, Mrs. Fairfax. I may come over again soon?"

"If you like—only it is best to give me notice beforehand, as I might be in London for the day. But, yes,"—softening as his face falls—"come when you like. Any day this week."

The Colonel's heavy moustache has sustained sundry pulls during this colloquy, and his face is a shade graver than usual as he steps into the vacant seat, and possesses himself of both oars. As with a few vigorous strokes the boat is once more in motion, the widow's eye for the first time lights upon the maimed left hand, and she exclaims in dismay:

"When—how—did *that* happen?"

"In South Africa—long ago. Don't be afraid. My sculling may be somewhat clumsy, but I will promise to get you safely home in due course of time."

"Oh! I was not thinking of myself. But does it not hurt you? I am so sorry I did not know before Sir Reginald left us! Or stay—could I help you, I wonder?"

"With those tiny baby hands of yours? No, no, I am getting on perfectly well; but give that steam-launch more space, or we shall get a tossing after she has passed."

A silence follows, during which both are busy with their own reflections. When Mrs. Fairfax lifts her eyes to her companion's face, it is so grave that she exclaims in wonder:

"I was going to say, 'A penny for your thoughts,' but from the expression of your countenance yours must be weighty enough to be worth much more. Won't you be generous and impart them gratis?"

A long pause, during which she leans over the side of the boat and idly dabbles one hand in the water.

"Take care," he says, warningly; "you will lose your rings."

"I have none on that hand; except ——"

She takes the little white fingers out of the water, and gazes half-sadly on the thick gold band—Jack's wedding-ring—placed there six years ago, and only eighteen months before Jack's own honest heart was still and cold.

Leslie Grahame is looking at it also, and somehow the sight nerves him to the next words he has to say.

"It is a long time since we met, is it not? I was with poor Jack when he bought that ring, and a few days later we had orders for India, and so I missed the wedding. But I did not forget my old friend or his bride—nor," he adds, more gently, "did I forget you when sadder news reached me. Poor Jack!" he says, dreamily, his thoughts busy with the boy-friend of his youth, and in a manner forgetting that he is speaking to that friend's widow; "so young, so open-hearted and generous ——"

"All that and more," she says, quickly; "he was too good for this

cold, hard world. Ah me! to think that Jack, who was so strong, should have been taken, and little me left to face life alone!"

"You have your child." Unconsciously his tone has grown a little stern again.

"Darling Queenie! Yes. But it *is* dull sometimes, and one wants someone to consult—to lean on."

"And you think to find that someone in Reginald Vane?"

He is sorry the next moment to have blurted out the words, but it is too late to recall them. She flashes a glance at him, and he meets it steadily, expecting to be assailed with a torrent of feminine wrath, but is taken aback at meeting instead a sudden burst of tears.

"Mrs. Fairfax—what a brute I am!—forgive me. I have lived so much alone that I have fallen into a dreadful habit of speaking my thoughts aloud."

"But how came you to have such thoughts?"

"Could I help it? Only last night I heard your names coupled together by the voice of common gossip, and to-day have I not seen some confirmation of the report? And I would not presume to find fault, though I was once not only Jack's friend, but almost a rough elder brother to you in the forgotten days of long ago."

"Not forgotten," murmurs a stifled voice; "only I wondered why you never came to see me."

"It was best not. I ——. Jack loved and trusted me—his mentor, as he used to call me, poor boy! But now—now, Nina, I cannot but think of the old days when I see you about to take an irretrievable step with one whom I cannot think worthy ——"

"You are jealous! Our grave Colonel actually condescending to such a weakness! And pray, may I ask, what makes you think Sir Reginald Vane unworthy—I don't say of little me—but of any good thing the world can bestow?"

"His dishonourable conduct towards another woman. Forgive me, Nina—heaven knows I would sooner bite my tongue out than say it—but he is playing a double part in this; making up to you for your fortune, while his heart—what heart he has to give—belongs to Miss Elliot. I saw him by her side last night. I watched the looks and signs that passed between them, and I speak solemn truth when I say that I believe he has won that poor girl's affections, and that in sober earnest he cares for her. And now that I have said my say, and brought a cloud over the face I have always connected with heaven's sunshine, I will go my way; only asking that, as time softens your anger, you will try to think a little kindly of me. Here is your landing-place."

And he pulls the boat into the tiny creek, and, resting on his oars, waits for her to spring ashore, and give him his final gesture of dismissal. But Nina does not move. Her head is bent down, and so overshadowed by her hat that he cannot read the expression of the faintly-flushed face.

It seems ages to him before the silence is broken. At last—"Did you always think me a dreadful flirt?"

He is startled and taken unawares by the appealing tone. Fain would he answer a re-assuring negative, but memories of the old days again rise before his mind—visions of the sweet little playmate grown suddenly into an exacting vain piece of womanhood—of poor Jack's alternate rapture and despair in the days of his brief, ill-considered courtship—and truth, the guiding-star of Leslie Grahame's nature, compels him to answer:

"I don't think you could help it—some women are formed to be the torment of every man who comes near them—it was your nature to be sweet and loveable."

"And now I am grown older and harder—and care only for admiration, so that I could stoop to pick up a heart that belongs of right to another woman. Oh, Leslie! you thought this!"

"By Heaven, I did you injustice," cries the Colonel, in a burst of self-reproach. "I've been insulting you all this time, and you have borne it like an angel: just as you used in the old days, when I was a big unmannerly boy, and tyrannised over you like the ruffian I was."

"And I liked you through it all." This is spoken very softly.

"Nina, Nina, do not drive me mad. You can do it—you always could—I went away years ago because I knew you cared for Jack."

"You did?"

"Was I not right? You would never have chosen me—the grave stern Scotchman, fifteen years your senior, in preference to that bright, sunny-hearted lad? And now, don't think, dear, that I have come back to harass you. I would not have seen you to-day, but that I could not bear to leave you unwarned of the gossip afloat. But now that you know, your woman's wit and your own brave little heart will prove your best defence. Good-bye, Nina. Say once that you forgive me—as you used long ago."

"Leslie!"

It is well that the drooping branches of a weeping willow have made a little secluded bower of the landing-place; well, too, that the gardener, coming down to moor the boat, does not arrive a minute sooner, or his astonished eyes might have seen what Queenie afterwards mysteriously reports. "My mammie crying, and Colonel Grahame comforting her, as mammie does me when I tumble down, holding her head on his shoulder and stroking her hair."

For Leslie Grahame's long-repressed tale of love has been spoken at last, and the little playfellow of early days—the prize which he gave up in bitter self-denial to his boy friend—has whispered to him the "Yes" which, had he been more far sighted, might have been spoken long ago, and have spared him years of self-inflicted exile.

A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S SPELL.

VIOLET was very lovely, and also very romantic. At seventeen she thought it strange that she had never been in love, and felt some curiosity as to what the sensation might be like. Of course if the "higher education of women" had been in vogue; if Cambridge examinations had claimed her youthful ardour, and if her fair head had been filled with abstruse geometrical questions, there would have been no room for so unprofitable a speculation as to whether a knight would come to woo. Alas, my Violet bloomed before these favoured days, and in her ignorance and simplicity she sought for a sign.

It was Midsummer-eve, and Violet's bosom friend, Cora, sat gazing at her with admiration, while the maid brushed out her golden tresses.

"Cora, to-morrow is Midsummer-day," said Violet. "Let us try a spell at midnight."

"What sort of a spell?" demanded Cora, lazily.

"One is to walk backwards to a rose-bush and pick from it a bud; you must not see the bud ——"

"We couldn't see much of it at midnight, dear," interrupted Cora.

"No. I mean you must keep it behind your back until you get home ——"

"*Still* walking backwards?" murmured Cora.

"Of course not, Cora—how can you be so foolish? Walk home any way you like, and then put the rose-bud, *without looking at it*, in a box; or some other safe place, where you must keep it until Christmas-day. On that day you must wear it, and whoever notices the withered rosebud to you first will be your husband."

"Good gracious! Have you to wait six months on *chance?* and then perhaps some aged friend of your father's will notice the bud!" exclaimed Cora. "One never sees any nice young men on Christmas-day, except one's cousins." A slight sigh indicated that sometimes even cousins were nice young men.

"Then another spell is to take an apple and eat it before a looking-glass," resumed Violet. "And if you are to marry that year, the face of your future husband will look over your shoulder."

"How frightful!"

The maid looked scandalised. Perkins fully sympathised with her young mistress, and wondered how anyone could say it would be "frightful."

"Well, but, Cora dear," said the beauty, pleadingly, "you will try to please me, won't you?"

"*Anything* to please you, love. Is it to be the apple or the rose-bud?"

"Oh, the rosebud; that's the surest. We'll try it to-morrow night."

"So be it, darling; and now I must dress for dinner," said devoted Miss Cora.

Midsummer-day was not pouring wet, and cold, and dismal. No; it was a nice old-fashioned summer's day—shall we ever see such again?—when the sun shone, and the birds sang, and the flowers bloomed in a hearty manner; and when twilight came, there was a soft balmy stillness over everything, which lasted into the night. Colonel Keen and his wife went to bed at half-past ten, and apparently their daughter and her friend did the same.

But in fact they only waited until the house was quiet, and then stole back to the deserted dining-room, where the windows opened out on the garden. Perkins was left upstairs. Violet and Cora sat down and earnestly watched the clock, by the light of a small wax taper, until the hands were both on twelve.

Then they softly stepped forth into the dark garden (for the moon gave a very faint light, being young and inexperienced herself), holding each other's hands tightly.

"We must go, walking backwards, to the Gloire de Dijon rose tree," whispered Violet.

"Oh!" half groaned Cora as they whirled round, and commenced their journey; "and it's down hill all the way!"

A very joggy and comfortless walk brought them to the rose bush.

"Oh! Cora! isn't it delicious?—I feel so nervous!" whispered Violet, as she groped about behind her for a rosebud.

"I'm getting wretchedly scratched!" retorted Cora, doubtful of the real pleasure of the expedition. "Where *are* the things?"

They had just managed to secure a bud each when a rustling amongst the bushes near made the girls start—and in the dim light they saw a man's figure emerge. To Violet's romantic mind, he was there in answer to their incantation; to Cora, he was a burglar. The latter seized her friend's hand, and strove to hasten their steps homeward; but the man sprang before them, and held a pistol menacingly in front of their faces.

"Speak a word, ladies, and I'll fire! Keep still, and I'll not harm you."

The intended screams were stopped piteously, stifled at the threat. The ruffian went on.

"You've been so obliging as to leave the window open for my particler friend, who wanted to make a call at your house to-night and hardly knew how to get in. When he comes out, you may go in. That's fair."

In terrified silence, the girls looked towards the house; the only light visible was that of the wax taper in the dining-room. Eagerly

they watched, tremblingly they waited till the dark shadow of a man was distinguished coming out at the window, and labouring towards them, carrying a heavy load in a sack.

"You go on, Bill," said the man with the pistol. "I'll purtect the ladies for five minutes more, while you get a start—then I'll join ye."

And Violet heard the chink of her father's forks and spoons as the sack-laden fellow made off. The five minutes seemed an hour; but they passed, and the man spoke his last words.

"Good night, ladies—as fine a Midsummer-night as ever I see."

His departure followed. Thus released, trembling and faint, Violet and Cora reached the house. There they bolted the window with useless care, and might have remained in misery in the dining-room all night, but for Perkins.

Perkins (who had been eating an apple before her mistress's looking-glass, in the vain hope of seeing a man's face look over her shoulder) came down at length to see what could be detaining the young ladies. A few disjointed words of explanation, given with shivering terror, were enough to set Perkins off in a screaming-fit, which alarmed the house.

Paterfamilias and his wife came down in surprising garments; the servants huddled in the passage until they were certain all was safe, and then advanced to the rescue; and the poor stricken beauty and her pale friend were sufficiently restored by the aid of cordials and a reassuring number of bed-room candles, to tell the whole story. The father raged, the mother wept; and the girls crept up to bed, each unconsciously clasping tight a crushed rose-bud!

Christmas came, and there was a party at Colonel Keen's. Cora whispered slyly:

"Did *he* notice your rose-bud, dear?"

"I threw it away for fear someone else might be the first to say anything!" confessed Violet.

But "he" seemed safely landed, and listened with sympathy and interest to his host's apologies for the electro-plate on the table, and the reason it was there in place of the splendid family silver.

MINNIE DOUGLAS.

R. AND E. TAYLOR.

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WINIFRED POWER.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

RICHARD'S QUIXOTRY.

DURING the terrible days of the Commune Winifred Power had lived in a kind of lurid dream.

She was not a politician, far less a partizan, and if asked a month earlier with which men or tendencies in distracted France her sympathies went, she would most assuredly have been puzzled to answer.

But she was too generous not to be stirred to pity in the inevitable hour when the aspirations of the people were bartered by the selfish and the mean; and her heart was wrung with compassion for the sons and daughters of toil, who, after suffering from generation to generation, and sinning in one brief hour of mistaken hope, turned anew to face the grim reality of wretchedness, and learnt that their sufferings were to be forgotten and only their sins remembered.

She came home one day in a state of great excitement. "It is hard," she cried passionately; startling Martha Freake at her patient work of bandage-making. "You remember Anatole?"

"That nice-looking young joiner you had in once to do some work? Did I not hear that he had joined the Commune?—God help him!" answered Martha.

"He was very enthusiastic and eloquent.—I am sure he was single-minded. And he was as tender as a woman to his poor old bed-ridden mother."

"And has he been killed?"

"No; but arrested. And he will be déporté.—And if he lives to come back, he will be ruined in mind and soul and body."

Martha sat silent: deeply sorry, yet half afraid to say so. She and Winifred had so many poor neighbours and knew them all so well, that her own gentle heart had no room for any feeling but compassion. But she would fain have taught all struggling humanity her own remedy of patience and faith: her own saintly shrinking from violence.

Winifred, quite lifted out of herself in thinking of the miseries and terrors of the Commune, clasped her hands with something of despair.

Martha looked at her lovingly, admiringly, yet a little afraid that her impulsive nature might lead her to commit some rash but well-intentioned act that would possibly land her in troubled waters.

"I hope I shall be left to you for a while," she said simply.

"Dear Patty! for a long while, I trust," answered Winifred, affectionately, and took the wasted hand that was a kind of mute denial of her hope. "But why do you say that now?"

Martha gave one of her wistful smiles.

"You are the best thing I have ever known, Winifred. I would like, before I die, to see you in some safe and tender keeping."

Winifred laughed, perhaps to mask a feeling that Martha's words had roused. "I believe you are afraid that if left to myself I should turn into a new Théroigne de Méricourt," she said. "But you can set your mind at rest, Patty; I have no enthusiasm for a cause. Evil and good seem to me so evenly balanced in all these questions, that I can but weep with the vanquished unit—poor scapegoats, like Anatole, for whose ruined homes society has no pity."

Martha drew closer, and put her head on Winifred's shoulder. This was a pathetic little trick that she had whenever her young protectress showed this too Quixotic spirit. And the girl never failed to feel the appeal, although, perhaps, unconsciously. The sense of Martha's dependence on her was an anodyne to her restlessness, a solace to that passionate desire in her to succour and console, which amounted sometimes to actual pain.

"It always seems to me, darling," said Martha, presently, "that you can afford to be a little adventurous and exaggerated because you are so strong. Your difficulties are never too many for you; you can always carry them. I do not know how to express myself exactly; but I think that other people's difficulties are a kind of snare to them. They get meshed before they know where they are."

"Why, Patty! you are becoming a philosopher. You have expressed in a word what I was trying to think out about poor Anatole."

"Yes," said Martha, quietly. "But I was not thinking of Anatole, but of Dick."

"Oh, Dick!" Winifred's voice changed a little, and her face fell. Martha had made her wince beneath a sharp twinge of self-reproach. One evening, shortly before the firing of the Hôtel de Ville, Richard Dallas had looked in upon them to see, as he said, "if they were safe." Winifred, living on the borders of the workmen's faubourg, went about so fearlessly among the wounded, and counted so many friends among the terrible prolétariat, that the Dallases, especially Dick, were in the habit of half-laughingly prophesying that she would one day be arrested by the Versaillais herself.

Richard, on this special evening, had come in one of his most cynical moods; and found Winifred in her most exalted one. She

had been living all day amid scenes of horror; had seen more than one death, witnessed more than one outburst of tragic despair, and come nearer than she had ever expected to do to the unmarked springs of human feeling. At last some sneer at the people (a sneer very characteristic of the Dallases) stung her to retort.

"It is easy to talk," she flamed out. "No doubt they have sinned, and they are punished by failure. I do not defend them, but I cannot understand anyone being triumphant over their expiation. Ignorance, life-long poverty, and grinding toil are very evil counsellors. If *their* class has much to repent of, has *ours* nothing to expiate? And if they have soiled the sanctity of their cause with crime, is the vengeance of their conquerors one whit less criminal?"

Dick sat quite silent: surprised a little, for Winifred did not often lecture; and also a little amused. She had looked surprisingly handsome as she poured out her eager protest. Moreover her grace and the beauty of her voice suited her momentary rôle. Where another woman must have shrieked and gesticulated, she had all the loveliness of a genuine inspiration. Dick, like all undecided men, was rather attracted by energy in a woman than repelled; and he met Winifred's flashing eyes with a flicker in his own of suppressed but decided admiration. Nevertheless, partly out of love of teasing, he answered with deliberate contempt:

"Because there is not much to choose between the ruffianism that writes its name at the bottom of a cheque and the ruffianism that cannot write at all, I fail to see why one should refrain from shooting any number of murderous roughs. They should be treated like the mad dogs they resemble."

Winifred closed her eyes to hide her starting tears. Perhaps Dick felt instinctively the reproach of her silence, for he added presently, with a fine air of aristocratic fastidiousness:

"I am not particular, but in a world which is composed of swindlers and liars, I confess that I prefer the washed to the unwashed specimen."

Winifred turned and looked at him. He did not take warning by her glance, but continued airily: "Most active people are utterly mischievous; and passive people, like myself, are useless."

"It is a disgrace to your humanity to say such things," answered the girl in low, quiet tones of intense scorn.

The dusky colour flushed into Dick's cheeks. "I do not seem able to please you by anything I say to-night," he remarked a little sullenly, and yet ruefully too. "If I thought you really cared, I might be better," he added, almost in a whisper, and looked straight into her eyes. Chilled by this unexpected obtrusion of personal aims into the midst of her enthusiasm, she pushed back her chair and rose abruptly, saying:

"What can keep Dolly? This is one of her evenings for teaching: but she should be home by now."

"And home she is," said Dolly's own fresh, complacent tones; and her small figure, rain-bespattered, was framed in the door. "Oh, Mr. Dallas!" (unaffectedly pleased and a little patronising) "you see Winifred has not blown us up with petroleum yet. I suppose you know that is her friends' latest threat: but they promise to spare her."

And Dolly laughed at her own wit. She laid aside her waterproof and hat, looking critically the while at the preparations for tea; and as soon as she had divested her small hands of their gloves, walked over and offered one of them condescendingly to Dick.

"What is the matter? Are you not well?" she exclaimed, on thus coming nearer to him.

"Quite well—thanks. Worthless people usually are," answered Dick, a little bitterly.

"Dear me! That sounds quite tragic," said Dolly, good-naturedly. Her bright eyes glanced from one person to another enquiringly; and with characteristic penetration, quickly divined the facts—but not so unerringly their cause.

"Have you and Winifred fallen out?"

"I think that Dick and I will never fall out," said Winifred, gravely, but kindly. "Our good-fellowship—quite a venerable quality by now—will survive all mistakes."

"Even mistaken aspirations?" asked Dick.

"Yes. And ill-advised scoldings," replied Winifred, with one of her charming looks.

"Don't talk about aspirations, for goodness sake," interposed Dolly. "I am sick of the word. If it had not been for a lot of tiresome 'aspirations' (at least, that is what Winifred calls them) we should have had those nice Versaillois in two months ago; and by this time I might have had six lessons where I now have three."

Winifred was so glad of the chance, at that moment, to laugh at anything, that she even laughed at this. And Dick laughed also. While Dolly, with her usual small smile of unassuming superiority, sat down to cut the bread and butter.

For the rest of the evening Dick was rather silent, and Winifred talked to him in a kind, sisterly way, that was intended to bring back things between them exactly to their accustomed footing. And when Dick at last rose to go, Dolly, instead of coming forward as she generally did, to light him downstairs, allowed this gracious task to be performed by her decidedly unwilling friend.

Winifred would have given anything to avoid these dangerous "last words," but Dolly never even rose from her seat: just nodded a "good-night" of serene friendliness, and proceeded to thread a needle.

So Winifred walked silently on to the landing and held the lamp aloft, Dick following her with great deliberation.

"Good-night."

"Good night."

"I wish he would go!" thought Winifred, and stood like a statue of Psyche. But Dick lingered. At last, when the silence was becoming oppressive, he abruptly said: "I am not capable of sustained action, Winifred; but I might put on a spurt of heroism perhaps. I promise you that if, within the next few days, I get the chance of distinguishing myself, I will not neglect it." Then, before she could speak, he ran downstairs, and she heard the great porte-cochère close behind him.

Dolly and Winifred occupied one of the two sole bed-rooms in their tiny apartment: and the hour of the twenty-four to which the latter looked forward with amused pleasure or patient dread (according as she was preoccupied or the reverse) was the time of undressing, during which Dolly incessantly chattered. Her mind was small, but acute, compact and clear-cut as the facets of a crystal. Winifred and she had not a thought or a feeling in common; but they got on admirably together, the one being too noble and the other too insouciante to quarrel. Moreover Winifred, touched by Dolly's energy, half-unconsciously rewarded it by indulging the minute creole propensities towards ease which here and there streaked the little thing's activity. One of these forms of petting was a nightly brushing of Dolly's curly locks. During this operation the stream of conversation was generally at fullest flow; but to-night Dolly sat almost quite silent, and did not even betray the usual little quiver of profound delight which Winifred had long ago noticed in her, and laughingly described as "a latent purr." She herself, on this occasion, was not more disposed to talk than her companion, for she had an uneasy suspicion that Dolly was thinking of Dick.

But all at once the two girls' eyes met in the glass, and the ice was broken.

"Winifred, I am not plain, do you think?"

"Conceited child! Are you fishing for superfluous compliments?"

"Nor stupid?"

"By no means."

"Nor a bore?"

"Will you be satisfied when I have told you that you are irresistible?"

"Don't laugh," said Dolly, with serious candour. "I am quite in earnest. I am following out a train of thought."

This is very often a stupendous operation, but she announced it with the evident conviction that no mental achievement could be considered beyond her.

"By all means; let me have the result."

"You are *handsome*, I know," resumed Dolly, glancing complacently down her own mignonne form. "And you talk about a number of things that it is the fashion to call clever. But, I own, I am sometimes afraid you will be a failure, though rather a grand one. But even so, it would be a pity to waste your gifts

and capabilities on ordinary people, and commonplace opportunities."

Dolly came to a full stop.

"What do you mean?" asked Winifred, with a merry, surprised laugh.

"I think Mr. Dallas fancies he is in love with you. (He would not be a Dallas if he did not fancy something.) But as you would be quite thrown away on him, it is a pity you should encourage him."

"How do you know that I encourage him?"

"I daresay you call your interest in him by some fine, philosophical name, but it is mere flirting for all that," was the calm reply. Winifred bit her lip, for the little barb had shot home; and she remained so long silent that at last Dolly raised her quiet eyes.

"Have I offended you?" Winifred had a sharp, brief struggle with her pride; then, bending her stately golden head, she drew Dolly's small dark face to her, and kissed it kindly on the forehead. People never would understand her, it seemed. A little time ago it had appeared to her so easy to go through existence, giving always more than she received; squandering with both hands her treasure of helpfulness and sympathy, and asking for nothing in return but that people should do their best. But of late she had been conscious in herself of a longing for something more than that critical and half-hearted homage: and at such times, the memory of her last interview with Mark Hatherley would return to her, and bring with it a rush of half-delightful, half-reluctant humility.

The next day the Tuileries went up in flames. Then the final barricades were taken; and "peace" (as at Warsaw) reigned in the stricken city. Most people's occupations were more or less interfered with when not altogether suspended; there was little visiting, in any social sense, and all conventional ceremonies seemed a mockery. Consequently, Winifred, Martha, and Dolly were almost startled one evening when a loud summons of the bell warned them of a visitor; and it was with mixed feelings of pleasure and relief that they welcomed Mrs. Dallas. Her good little figure and timid motherly manner seemed really like the promise of a return to normal things.

"Thank you, my love," as Winifred began to unfasten her cloak. "You are better, Miss Freake? Still coughing? Dear—dear! Do try tar lozenges; they always do Mr. Dallas so much good. Georgie hopes you will come to spend the afternoon soon, Dolly. Winifred, do you happen to know anything of Richard?"

"Richard?" Winifred's heart sank within her.

"He is missing. Has been for three days. Mr. Dallas says he is sure to turn up; but I thought I might as well step round and ask if you knew anything of him." She spoke quite placidly, although her serene face clouded a very little. Questioned, she had nothing to relate beyond the bare fact of Richard's disappearance. "He might merely have gone to Versailles for a change," she

suggested. "Paris was not very agreeable just then. The smell of smoke was sometimes quite suffocating."

"But surely he would have left word with you," exclaimed Dolly. She was really alarmed, and did not care to conceal it. Winifred sat silent, much too remorsefully concerned to offer any remark. All at once, she became aware that the tears were rolling silently down Mrs. Dallas's cheeks; impulsively then she went close to her, and took her hands.

"Such dreadful things have been happening. I can't help thinking sometimes that he may have been shot," said the poor little woman apologetically. "Mr. Dallas says I am very foolish to have such ideas. Of course, Richard is not my own son; but he was only five when I married Mr. Dallas, and such a pretty little curly-haired fellow! A telegram came for him," added she.

"And did that tell you nothing?" exclaimed Winifred eagerly.

"I did not open it, my love. He would not like it to be read perhaps," said Mrs. Dallas dutifully. And she had not told Mr. Dallas about it either, as the "children" did not care for their papa to know everything. Even at this moment Winifred could hardly forbear a smile, at such a quaint instance of motherly watchfulness. Nevertheless, she was possessed with the idea that the telegram might contain a key to the mystery, and so warmly urged its being opened that at last Mrs. Dallas began to hesitate. Still, she had not the courage to open it by herself; still less did she welcome the idea of sharing its secrets with her husband. "If Winifred would take the responsibility?"

Winifred was generally willing to take any responsibility, and made no exception now. She started off with Mrs. Dallas, and was quickly at her destination. Mr. Dallas was out; and so the telegram was impatiently opened and—proved a puzzle the more.

"Throw light on the receipt for the psalter, just found. I am accused of complicity. Answer at once.

"GERTRUDE."

There was not much to be made out of that, and it only gave an acuter edge to the desire for Richard's return. So poor Winifred, ruefully feeling that she had again "interfered," with questionable results, went home and devoted herself as best she could to the task of consoling Dolly.

It was curious to see how completely that little person had appropriated Richard in her own mind. She could not have mourned him more ostentatiously if he had been her affianced lover. Such perfect openness of sentiment in a nature so little romantic had the oddest effect; but it probably made Dolly's force. She knew exactly what she wanted, and never doubted but that she would eventually get it. And such people always succeed.

Nevertheless, her tear-stained little countenance was quite a

pathetic object, and put the crown to Winifred's misery. Twenty-four hours passed in this way, and then one afternoon the two girls were surprised by a visit from Claire.

The fleuriste was generally too busy to make calls, and Winifred had hardly seen her since the day when, through her, she had found out Miss Freake. She went forward in some surprise and pleasure to receive her, but without waiting for any greeting, Claire exclaimed: "You have been anxious about Monsieur Richard? Ah, yes! I knew it. But, chère mademoiselle, he is safe. Thank Heaven he is safe—but he had been heroic. My—gratitude—my ——." And at this point Claire, rendered quite speechless by a breathless combination of smiles and tears, sat down, nodded intelligently at her bewildered listeners, and went on volubly again. Monsieur Richard was an angel of goodness. Claire had met him on the very last day but one of the fighting. Avec son petit air calme—you would have thought he cared no more than a graven image what was happening. But he had a heart of gold under that English exterior: Claire had always felt it. He saw her looking sad; he asked the cause; she had poured out the whole story. Her young brother, a child of fifteen, had been led away by some friends of his to join the Federals. And at that very moment he was fighting, she was sure, on the barricade in the Rue ——. He would be killed fighting, or taken prisoner and shot, and Claire would never know a moment's happiness again. Monsieur Richard had no sooner heard this story than he said quite quietly, "I will go and see if I cannot save him;" and almost before Claire could seize the sense of the words he was gone. Mais quoi! she almost laughed on recalling them; he had meant nothing: she could not have heard aright, or it was a mere way of speaking. The days went on—and Réné returned not. She was sure he was killed—the vision of him lying in his blood haunted her. She went to the police, to the hospitals, to the Morgue even, but found no trace of him. She could not eat, she could not sleep, she was crazy. And at last to-day, just as she felt that she could bear it no longer, a stranger came. Réné was alive; he was getting better of his wounds; and it was Monsieur Richard who had saved him.

"But how?" cried Winifred and Dolly in a breath, as Claire again paused from mingled emotion and exhaustion.

Monsieur Richard had gone to the barricade, and reached it just as the fight was raging. The Communards had fallen back for a moment, leaving several prisoners in the hands of the Versaillais. Among them was Réné. Oh, heavens! that child. Monsieur Richard recognised him. The fédérés rallied, and made a fresh charge, Monsieur Richard with them, for he had picked up a musket that fell from the hand of some wounded man. They rescued the prisoners, but Réné was struck and had fallen; he would have been crushed; but Monsieur Richard lifted him up, and, carrying him in his arms, ran with

him along the top of the barricade under a murderous volley of musketry. For fresh troops had arrived, and were encouraging the others. The next moment the barricade was again stormed and taken; but a final desperate stand of the Communards had given Monsieur Richard time to escape. He was wounded in the hand and bleeding; nevertheless, he reached a church that served for a temporary hospital, and gave Réné into the care of a doctor. Then he had his hand bound up, but he was faint from loss of blood, and could not go so far as his own home. Besides, he feared to compromise his people. So he took refuge with a medical student, a friend of his. In the night his wound became worse; he was feverish, a little delirious even, and only to-day had been able to send his friend first to enquire for Réné (who was better and had told the story of his rescue), then to Claire.

"And did he send no message to his family—his friends?" exclaimed Dolly, always practical.

"Yes, indeed," answered the fleuriste, warmly. "But the gentleman had engagements; he had lost time at the hospital; he begged her to take the good news. She went, but Madame and Mademoiselle Dallas were out, gone to Versailles to make enquiries there, pauvres chères dames; she could not wait, and had decided, as the next best thing, to come to Winifred and leave the message, with every expression of her own everlasting gratitude."

"You see Mr. Dallas may not talk very grandly, Winifred; but he can act," said Dolly, triumphantly.

"I hope he will one day know how proud you are of him, dear," answered Winifred; and her own eyes were bright.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DOLLY.

Dick strolled in a day or two later, looking pale, and with his arm in a sling, otherwise quite unconcerned. Dolly and Winifred happened to be present, with Mrs. Dallas and Georgie; they all sprang up to greet him in glad excitement. But Mr. Dallas, at work upon some illustrations, looked up from his drawing-block with an air of calm contemplation; and his composure was fully equalled by Dick's own.

Outwardly he was rather bored than otherwise by these loving demonstrations, and if anybody could be said to have obtained an answering look from him, it was certainly Dolly. She had, indeed, gone up to him in such eager welcome, looking so pretty in her pleasure the while, that his courtesy was momentarily transmuted into a warmer sentiment.

"You had no need to be anxious about me. You must have known I could take care of myself," he said carelessly, in answer to their affectionate reproaches.

"That was what I tried to impress upon them all," said Mr. Dallas; who, to do him justice, had made secret enquiries for his missing son, while pooh-poohing the "womenkind's" anxiety—on principle. "But to be frank with you, Dick, I am not sure but you have been more fortunate than you deserved."

"A case of a bad shilling, you think?" asked his son.

"It is not your having run into danger that I object to. Your bones are your own to do what you like with," continued Mr. Dallas, with a fine air of impartial munificence. "But to join those villainous ragamuffins! You must have been crazy."

"Take care, papa. You will call down Winifred's wrath," laughed Georgie.

"No," said Winifred, quite softly: but her tone, unconsciously, had a light ring of sarcasm, and Dick turned his eyes upon her.

"Winifred thinks no Dallas a foeman worthy of her steel," he remarked.

"Indeed! I flatter myself I could produce an argument or two as keen as any weapon in her armoury of logic," said Mr. Dallas, rather piqued.

"Possibly. But all counter-thrusts would be wasted upon the family cuirass of self-satisfied superiority," retorted Dick; and this was so exactly what Winifred had been thinking that she could not forbear a merry laugh of appreciation. "By George," continued the young man, "I sometimes amuse myself by constructing a family legend. It runs in this wise. A remote ancestor of ours—for we have a long line of ancestors, Miss Dorothy; we are very aristocratic—having wasted all his substance, lost his steed, been abandoned by his squire, and jilted by the damsel of his dreams, was sitting in a mournful mood under a greenwood tree. To him there appeared a little wizened woman, whom he recognised immediately for a fairy godmother. He began to reproach her: why had she not made him luckier? He was a handsome youth still, albeit a graceless, and her heart, although several centuries old, was touched. She explained to him that his beauty and his talent, the gallant grace that made him irresistible at starting *always*—were her gifts; but that for the ill-luck a malignant fay, whom one of the race had offended, was responsible. And she, although she grieved to state it, saw nothing but failure in every career for him and all his line. He was very much shocked, and asked if there were no remedy. The doom, she said, was unavoidable; but one thing she could do for him, and that was to render himself and all future Dallases invulnerable. Then she presented him with a crystal flask containing water from a magic well, which had properties analogous to those of the Stygian wave; and vanished after assuring him that if he rubbed himself all over with the liquid, and did not lose a drop, he would become both morally and physically pachydermatous (only she did not use so barbarous a word), and transmitting the valuable attri-

bute to his own offspring would enable them and all their descendants to live—through a mere survival of the fittest."

The three girls laughed and clapped their hands; but Mr. Dallas sat with a slightly contemptuous smile upon his face. His wife looked a little—just a little—scandalised.

"You bad boy!" she said. "What a character to give your family. I am sure dear papa is too sensitive" (Mr. Dallas involuntarily straightened himself); "and then there is Gerty, poor child!—I wish she felt things less."

"Ah! I suppose Sir Guy de Dallas de Malaventure did spill a few drops," answered Richard carelessly, but with a softened glance at his good little step-mother, whom he had the grace honestly to love.

"It is plain he did," said Dolly; "or you would not have that sling on now."

"That's what I call a pretty speech," said Mrs. Dallas kindly. "I do believe dear Dolly feels more for you than any of us."

Whereupon Dolly blushed furiously—partly with shy consciousness, partly with a naif pleasure. And she said, in a voice that thrilled with mixed feeling: "It is natural I should feel sorry for him, is it not?"

"Only natural because you do not know what a mere scratch my wound is," said Dick smiling, rather flattered.

"A scratch? nonsense!" said Dolly gaily. "This is a scratch. The Princess Badoura" (nodding at the Dallases' white Persian cat) "gave it me the other day—with a will too. But I don't carry my arm in a sling," and she held out her pretty, round wrist for his inspection.

Dolly had charming hands: a little brown in colour, but slender and graceful and expressive. Dick took the one extended to him, and let it lie for a moment in his own sinewy palm. Its beauty struck him: its warm touch was magnetic: he pressed it, and looked from the hand to the face. That was pretty also—in just the same brown, piquant way. She had very bright vivacious eyes and a sparkling smile, her teeth gleaming like pearls beneath lips as scarlet as the flower of a pomegranate. Between her warm, soft prettiness, her quick, deft ways, and the touches of rich colour, never wanting to her soberest dress, Dolly always reminded one of a small tropical bird. And her quaint practical mind and manner accentuated this physical charm. Dick had noticed all this before: vaguely, as one notices when but slightly interested. Now, for the first time, he *felt* it. He had been secretly wounded by Winifred's studied indifference; he was touched now by Dolly's frank sympathy. Her glance faltered and softened as his own met it. They were standing behind Mrs. Dallas's capacious armchair.

"Let us see this scratch," said Richard, in his cool, insouciant way. He bent his head lower: the little hand trembled: then, the next moment rested joyfully in his clasp, for, unseen by everybody but its owner, he had kissed it.

Meanwhile Winifred was telegraphing to Mrs. Dallas, but had only succeeded in reducing that gentle person to a condition of patient bewilderment. In fact she very nearly turned to look behind her own chair, which was the last thing that Winifred would have desired had she known what was going on there. So, at last, Georgie, who had understood at once what Winifred meant, rose, vanished, and presently returned with an air of great mystery. Her eyes were fixed on her father: a paper was half-concealed by the folds of her dress. It was Gertrude's telegram.

"Hallo! what's the meaning of this?" exclaimed Dick, after the telegram had been surreptitiously introduced into his hands by Georgie, while Mrs. Dallas asked Mr. Dallas the hour by his watch. "When did this come?"

"Seven days ago, when you were first missing."

"What is it?" questioned Mr. Dallas. "A telegram from Gerty? What about? Is she going to separate from Sir John?"

"It's a matter of no importance," answered Dick, thrusting the paper into his pocket, and inflicting thereby intense disappointment on Georgie and some pangs of baffled curiosity on her mother.

"We have not heard for some days from Gerty," said the latter in her comfortable, maternal tones. "I daresay her new life is busier than her home one—poor child!"

At this moment there was a knock at the door, and in marched Julie, the Dallases' one servant. There were frequent crises in the household, and they never kept any servant long. The present and out-going "young person" arrived with an air of unmistakeable temper; and her appearance created a kind of low, suffused groan. Mr. Dallas extracted his pocket-book to pay her her wages, previous to immediate departure, Georgie picked up the cat with an air of ostentatious indifference, Mrs. Dallas became absorbed in her work. They were none of them on speaking terms with Julie, who had worsted them in several encounters. She stood like a statue while her money was counted out to her; took it and asked for her certificate. "You shall have it," said Mr. Dallas, with significant dignity, and wrote it. She read it when finished, and apparently was satisfied, for she plunged her hand into her pocket, uttered a "Tenez" of supreme contempt, and throwing several letters upon the table, stalked out of the room. Presumably she had sequestrated the Dallases' correspondence for some days, intending to make away with it altogether if her claims to a presentable certificate were not satisfied.

Georgie rushed at the letters with all the eagerness of a girl who receives one twice in a twelvemonth. "Two from Gerty, and black-edged! What can have happened!"

They were torn open and eagerly devoured, amid general excitement. "Sir John ruined"—"Sir John dead"—"Chloral"—"Inquest"—"Mrs. Hatherley's behaviour"—"The conduct of the

neighbourhood!" All these astounding items of news, tumbled out heterogeneously by Georgie, who was reading over her mother's shoulder, excited the liveliest feelings of indignation and dismay. Nor were these sentiments altogether unmixed with embarrassment; for Gertrude was by no means measured in her abuse of Mrs. Hatherley, and Georgie, blushing a vivid red, stopped abruptly every now and then in her helter-skelter reading—pulled up by the consciousness of Dolly's presence.

Fortunately that little person was not sensitive on the subject of her relatives. Moreover, she was naturally feeling very warmly just now about anything which concerned Richard; and finally, she was consumed with curiosity. "Pray go on!" she exclaimed, with eager affability, as Georgie stumbled—all too tardily—anew; "I know quite well how horrid mamma can be sometimes, and Flossie can be too."

"My dear!" began Mrs. Dallas, gently, rather shocked at such candour.

"Since Dolly does not mind our saying it, I think Mrs. Hatherley *has* behaved abominably," indignantly broke in Georgie. "Just read to the bottom of the page. *I never!!* Gertrude has a horrid temper, but she isn't a thief or a murderess."

"Who accuses her?" enquired Mr. Dallas.

"Mrs. Hatherley; Flossie; the nurse; *your* mother, Winifred. Such things to say! And that business of the Psalter, too. I—Oh! I wish *I* was there!" cried Georgie, and fairly burst out crying.

"Let me see what she says about the Psalter," said Richard, slowly, possessing himself of one letter.

"Let *me* read what she says. It is impossible to understand anything," cried Mr. Dallas, testily, and seized the other letter.

"What is this about the Psalter? Here is a fresh allusion to it, Dick, and to your share in it."

Dick, looking calmly incensed and contemptuous, shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose I may consider myself released now from my promise of secrecy. Sir John got me to sell it for him, months ago, when I left The Limes."

A simultaneous exclamation of horror broke from Winifred and Dolly. "And he allowed poor William to be suspected!"

"I understand now, that the sale was part, perhaps the beginning, of his underhand system of raising money," continued Richard, rather bitterly. "But I dare say Gerty has exaggerated a good deal."

"I am sure she has," promptly assented Mr. Dallas.

"Naturally she would be excited, poor child!" added the meek little mother, smothering her own anxiety, as usual.

Consequently it was agreed that there was no immediate reason for action: that they could safely wait for a day or two until fresh news came; and that, meanwhile, Richard could write to his sister. This he did at once. Mr. Dallas lighted a fresh pipe, and, the excitement having put him into a genial mood, he proceeded to

relate various pleasing anecdotes of unjust suspicion and deceitful appearances. Georgie's sobs gradually subsided, and her mother produced a jar of her favourite quince jam for her especial solace.

That night, when Winifred was sitting alone in her studio, thinking, if the truth must be told, of Mark, and wondering when she should see him again, there came a gentle tap at the door.

"Are you there, Winifred?" asked Dolly's voice outside.

"Yes." Winifred sprang up, and came forward through the semi-darkness, smiling, with a prescience of the coming confidence. Dolly did not keep her waiting for it long; in her practical, prattling way, transfigured to prettiness here and there through a touch of real feeling, she told her that "she knew Mr. Dallas was beginning to care for her now." She had been quite enchanted at his kissing her hand, and related that circumstance, among others, with all possible detail. Winifred listened appreciatively; answered warmly; was genuinely delighted.

"The news from The Limes is exciting also," casually commented Dolly at last, when she positively had nothing more to tell about herself. "Altogether, it has been an evening of emotion. I suppose we shall hear from mamma soon and from your mother? They are both bad correspondents. The only person who seems to have behaved well to Lady Hatherley is Mark. I should be glad to know his opinion of the whole business. He never writes to you, does he?"

"Never," answered Winifred, as a beginning to many other things that she intended to say. But all at once her ideas vanished. Dolly's voice sounded in her ears without conveying any meaning to them. She involuntarily clasped her hands together, and held them so tightly, as though the Winifred of her dreams, the Winifred she had meant to be, but was not, were enclosed there. For Dolly's question had unconsciously enlightened her, and conveyed to her the humiliating conviction that Mark's silence robbed self-sacrifice, work, duty, life itself, of charm.

Martha Freake was not so well next day. She frequently alternated from one state to the other; and Winifred had a melancholy feeling that the end was very near. Finding her now so weak, Winifred quietly decided that the greater part of the day must be given up to nursing her, and she consequently let Dolly go alone to the Dallases to ask for further news from The Limes. Dolly, nothing loth, as may be imagined, started off, the recollection of the previous evening keeping up sweet music in her heart as she hurried through the streets.

But a surprise awaited her. Instead of the scene that she had expected, viz., a new letter from Gertrude, and the family party discussing it in their own peculiar fashion, she found that no fresh news had come from The Limes; while the anxiety this might have caused under ordinary circumstances, was quite forgotten in a different source of interest. Dick had been offered employment

in America, and was seriously inclined to accept it. An old friend of Mr. Dallas's had a numismatic mania. Wealth acquired in the States had enabled him to gratify this taste; and now possessing an almost unique collection, he wished to have it catalogued. He could presumably have found a young man in his own town of Boston to do it for him; but he chose to prefer Dick to any other. Chance had made him acquainted with Mr. Dallas's position, and Mr. Dallas was one of those people who, without one single recommendation save an indefinable charm, are kept afloat by the tenacious memory and the inexhaustible patience of their friends.

"I suppose there is no danger of this cataloguing turning out a mere blind, like Sir John's," he said—always wonderfully cautious when he himself had nothing to gain or lose.

"Not likely," answered Dick. "Such a coincidence would be too unlucky, even for us. And the best guarantee of his good faith is the figure of the offered salary. I think I cannot do better than accept."

"Then accept, by all means, my boy. Who knows? You may be able to do even your unfortunate old father a good turn: and we could all join you. Georgie might marry the chief shareholder in some silver mine, and you find your way into the good graces of an heiress."

A pause. Dick and Georgie were both rather flattered, while the bewildered Mrs. Dallas was engaged in her usual chase after the nimble minds of her family. Only Dolly stood a stranger in their midst, her heart feeling like a lump of ice, her eyes full of a wistful disenchantment that would have struck pity in anybody sufficiently at leisure to heed her.

Dick disappeared to answer the letter; his father, dreaming of an El Dorado, left his work, already in arrears, and went to smoke on the Boulevard, while Mrs. Dallas and Georgie kept up a lively babble, and Dolly answered without understanding them. The poor child was quite unable to re-act as a stronger, prouder, and more complex nature would have done, against the sorrow that had overtaken her. Her character, all of a piece, was completely submerged for the moment by the waters of bitterness closing over it.

"Have you a headache?" asked Georgie at last, after receiving a dozen random answers.

"No," answered Dolly, too miserable even to feign.

"I daresay dear Dolly is troubled at not hearing from The Limes. Indeed, we all have cause for anxiety," remarked Mrs. Dallas.

"Yes," said Dolly, just as mechanically as before.

The minutes went on. Perhaps it was the anguish of her heartbeats that made every second ticked off the clock seem like the blow of a little hammer on her temples. Dick re-entered only just in time to save her from a burst of weeping. The instant he appeared she rose involuntarily, and announced that she must go.

"So soon," said Mrs. Dallas.

"Yes," answered Dolly, simply. "Good bye."

Out of so dazed and laconic a mood there was no explanation to be had evidently.

They kissed her, wished her good-bye, sent their love to Winifred. Dick accompanied her to the ante-chamber and gave her her sun-shade, then held out his hand in farewell. Dolly put her slender, ice-cold fingers into his grasp, and raised to his face eyes so frankly, so unconsciously mournful, that he stepped backwards in surprise. The change in her appearance since the previous evening suddenly struck him, but with no such swift thought of its cause.

"What is the matter? Are you ill?"

"No—I—good-bye—I—oh, Mr. Dallas, will you really marry an heiress when you go to America?" burst out Dolly, rushing at the central horror of her thought with all the directness of a child.

Dick stood dumbfounded, and his silence falling on the poor little listener's heart like the stone of a sepulchre entombing all her hopes, she bent her face upon her hands and fairly sobbed aloud.

"Why!" exclaimed Dick, as soon as he recovered his voice, "I did not know—I never thought—please don't cry—marry an heiress? Heiresses are not so plentiful. Besides, I think I feel more like—now look up—you'll spoil your eyes—why, what a dear little thing you are!" And Dick, feeling that his surprise, his emotion, his disjointed phrases landed him in no satisfactory conclusion; vividly conscious, moreover, of Dolly's prettiness, and attracted by the very abyss of imprudence into which, as a Dallas, he was bound to plunge, abruptly stopped speaking, and folded the trembling form of the weeping girl to his side.

At this interesting moment, almost before Dolly's tears had time to change into a sob of rapture, there came a sharp ring at the bell. Dick, hastily releasing his companion, went to open the door and found Winifred on the threshold, looking rather excited. But, observant always, she was quick to notice the signs of recent agitation in Dolly, and stayed her speech to glance swiftly at Dick.

"Oh, Winifred!" exclaimed Dolly, smiling and breathless, "Mr. Dallas has got an appointment and is going to America."

"To America?" echoed Winifred. Then understanding, or thinking she understood, that this event was likely to bring Dolly's affairs to a crisis, she smiled with frank pleasure. "I am so glad."

"You are very kind," said Dick, with a quiet irony not far removed from bitterness. But Winifred, previously full of other thoughts, for once failed to catch the meaning of his tone.

"Dick," she said, a moment later, turning to him, "read this puzzling telegram that I have just received from Mark. Gertrude has run away from The Limes."

"Run away? Again! There is a tendency to repeat themselves about my sister's solutions of her difficulties," said Dick. But in

spite of this sneer, in itself not unkindly spoken, he looked grave after glancing at the telegram, and added, "This should be answered, and I must go to England."

"To-night?"

"To-night I cannot; to-morrow will be time enough."

CHAPTER XXX.

IN WHICH MARK MAKES DISCOVERIES.

Mrs. Hatherley and Florence, the very day after Gertrude's disappearance, betook themselves to London, unable to bear the monotony of The Limes, now that the excitement of the arch-enemy's presence was removed. "Mark," as they expressed it, "was too horribly 'grumpy';" and, indeed, he was not cheerful. Beset with creditors, worried with letters, feeling each hour widen the gulf between himself and all the pride, the hopes and illusions of the past, he spent many hours when love of work alone stood between him and despair. He was resolute to bring his father's affairs into order, and to redeem, as far as his own effort could do it, the blighted honour of his name. But the task was no easy one, and brought endless bitterness to his noble nature.

The arrival of Richard Dallas was welcome to him: not only because he came straight from Winifred—knew what she was doing—must speak of her unasked. Moreover, Dick was an agreeable companion, and had the tact to keep his affectations in the background when with sensible men. Concern, also, about Gertrude made him really serious, and attuned him to Mark's present mood. The result of their first consultation was the advertisement in the *Times*: which, as we know, produced nothing.

"It is more the responsibility of her disappearance than any great uneasiness that oppresses me," said Mark one morning. "After all, as a married woman with some experience of the world, she does, presumably, know how to take care of herself."

"Naturally. But when her money runs out, she will commit any act of extravagant folly rather than confess herself in the wrong, and ask help."

"Even should she have recovered from her scare about the state of things here?'

"Even so. I believe that the one motive power of all my sister's actions is what may be called the love of adventure'

"You do not then believe in the existence of this uncle?"

"What uncle?"

"Surely I explained to you that at the inquest Lady Hatherley stated that the mysterious stranger from Harwich who, as we suppose helped her to convert the jewels into money, was her uncle."

Dick made a gesture of surprise. "No doubt you mentioned it

but my head was bewildered with all the other details. Did she give him any name?"

"Yes; a name so well known, at one time, in our family, that it alone made me doubt the genuineness of her tale. She called him Ralph Mercer."

"By Jove! Of course it is then our reprobate—my good little step-mother's scamp of a brother. He was the only scamp that had appeared in the Mercer family for generations, and consequently plunged a large assortment of maiden aunts, and half-sisters of domestic tendencies into the greatest possible consternation. He decamped to America, in comparative youth, with a sum of money borrowed, without the ceremony of asking, from his employers, and hardly large enough to have made the adventure worth its risks."

"Yes," assented Mark, "and was only not prosecuted because those same employers had consideration for his family."

"They were in some way related, I think," answered Dick. "I know their name was Redfern, and that was my step-mother's maiden name. When she first married my father, and I was quite a little fellow, I remember this Ralph used to turn up at irregular intervals, always hungry, always needy, and to the same extent mysterious. The mother, ever anxious to think well of everybody, was greatly worried about him, but we have of late years not been favoured by him with any signs of life."

"Then you know nothing of his recent relations with Lady Hatherley?"

"Nothing whatever. Where can Gerty have met him?"

Mark smoked for a little while in silence. "If he has been living by his wits, he may not be quite unknown to the police. In that case, to discover his present abode would be easy."

"Stay," said Dick. "Let us wait before applying to the secret intelligence department. Perhaps we shall get an answer to our advertisement." Mark agreed, more than half divining Richard's thought. Ralph Mercer was by no means the kind of relative upon whom it is advisable to turn the strong light of publicity; and Gertrude, in her mingled audacity and inexperience, might be more compromised in some undertaking of his than her family would care to make known.

The inquest on Sir John was resumed. But all the coroner's acuteness failing to discover anything, the jury finally gave a verdict of "Death from natural causes." To be sure, Lady Hatherley's disappearance was not accounted for; but it was *the only* suspicious circumstance: "One swallow does not make a summer:" and the first keen edge had worn off the public appetite for scandal.

This happy result attained, Mark repeated the advertisement; but with no effect. Meanwhile Mrs. Dallas wrote daily in growing alarm, and even Mr. Dallas began to show signs of anxiety. Consequently the two young men found themselves at last with no choice but to

apply to a confidential enquiry office ; and within a very short time they thence learnt all that the reader has known before them. That is to say, they were informed that Lady Hatherley, on quitting The Limes, had taken refuge with her uncle, and had, the next day or so, been placed by him in the household of Mr. Graham. As Gertrude's interview with Dr. Kenyon had taken place but a few hours before the despatch of these particulars, her sudden departure was not included in the information. Therefore: "The best thing to be done is to call at Mr. Graham's and see Lady Hatherley," suggested Mark.

"The very best." And it was so settled. The letter had reached them by the morning's post; and two o'clock found them at Mr. Graham's door.

"Is Lady Hatherley in?" asked Mark, of the servant.

She stared. "Nobody of that name here, sir." Mark and Richard exchanged glances, and the latter bit his lip. An alias, and all the mystery it suggested, would be just like Gertrude's folly.

"This is Mr. Graham's house, is it not?—Is he at home?"

He was, and they were ushered into the drawing-room, where the maid left them while she went to carry their cards to Mr. Graham.

He came quickly—wonderfully so for him—and was accompanied by Dr. Kenyon, under whose gravity, a person knowing him very well might have detected some excitement.

"Mr. Dallas?" began Mr. Graham, enquiringly, his glance travelling from one to the other of his visitors, as Richard stepped forward. "Miss Dallas's brother, I presume?"

"Yes. Is my sister in?"

"In? She is gone."

"Gone?"

"She went yesterday. We were very sorry to lose her, my son and I; but she would go. She said she had received bad news and must return to Paris. I suppose she knows her own affairs best, but the suddenness of her decision annoyed and disturbed my son," added Mr. Graham, with a slight suspicion of testiness in his accent and manner. "She suited Ned. There are not many people who do please him, poor lad! and I had been a long time making up my mind to have a stranger in the house. Perhaps she found something to complain of; if so, I wish she had said it. Do you know why she left?" wound up Mr. Graham, suddenly turning to Dick.

"I think we had better tell all the circumstances. Will you do it, Hatherley?" said the young man. And thus admonished Mark related the whole story, explaining Gertrude's position, her identity, her wild scare at the inquest, the perfect groundlessness of her fears, and so on, Mr. Graham listening all the while with an irascibility, which was so largely mixed with sympathy for Gertrude, that he could hardly be polite to Mark. According to his views it must be somebody's fault that such a nice young woman had been wrongfully

suspected and needlessly alarmed, and Mark being the most prominent of her connections whom Mr. Graham could lay hold of at the moment, seemed to him the most obvious person to attack.

"Tut-tut! Your father's wife! Surely she might have been protected from such insult," said the unreasonable Egyptologist.

"I am afraid that in the late development of this business I am the most to blame, after all," quietly interposed Dr. Kenyon.

"You?"

"I. This lady—Miss Dallas, as we have been accustomed to call her—was, you must confess, Mr. Graham, introduced to you by a suspicious character."

"Suspicious!" interrupted Mr. Graham. "The best fellow in the world! Amused Ned by the hour at Brighton."

Dr. Kenyon shrugged his shoulders. "You never seemed to know much about Mr. Mercer, and, if I may so express it, Mr. Mercer seemed to know less about himself. He introduces to you a lady, young, beautiful, well-educated, who brings no references, but, on the other hand, makes no kind of objection to entering a household with no mistress at the head of it."

"And where was the harm of that?" again broke in Mr. Graham, looking rather red, too; for, like most scholars, he was as prudish as an elderly spinster.

"No harm whatever," resumed the doctor, coolly. "If I bring forward these facts, it is simply because they furnish the only explanation of my conduct. In an evil moment of leisure, I read in the *Times* an advertisement for a missing lady, whose description seemed to me to correspond singularly to Miss Dallas. I showed it to her. She grew troubled—a little angry. Would, however, explain nothing, and stated an immediate intention of leaving. And the very same day she put that intention into execution."

"And why the deuce could you not tell all this before?" exclaimed Mr. Graham.

"The lady had chosen her own solution to her difficulties. I was not bound to convey to you my suspicions—which, indeed, have turned out in a great measure unnecessary," said Dr. Kenyon, who made the admission in a tone of curious resentment. An observant listener might have concluded that Dr. Kenyon was divided between interest in Gertrude and some annoyance with himself for the feeling.

"I should like you to tell your sister that this house is always open to her," presently resumed Mr. Graham, again addressing Dick. "She made herself most agreeable, and Ned misses her sadly. For his sake alone I should be delighted to have her back again, and I should be glad also if she gave me a less selfish reason for welcoming her, by being willing to return."

"You are very kind, but ——" Dick paused, and glanced at Mark.

"I hope Lady Hatherley will not fancy herself obliged again to be a companion," observed the latter, gravely.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Graham, looking rather embarrassed. "You told me, of course, that she is your father's widow, but I have been so surprised by the strangeness and unexpectedness of all this story, that I do not think I have quite realised every point. I—ah—very stupid of me!—Hatherley? I knew some Hatherleys once, thirty-five years ago, in America."

"Those were, perhaps, my father's cousins," said Mark, interested. His late necessary examination of many family papers had given him a fuller knowledge of the Hatherley history, and had awakened in him a curiosity to know more about those kinsfolk, in whose hearts, and round whose names, so much bitterness had raged. That long dead-and-gone Esther Hatherley, who had so irrevocably alienated her brother, Mark's grandfather, by her marriage—had especially attracted the young man's imagination. For among his father's old letters were some written when Sir John was himself in America. There were some subtle touches of a soft feeling, almost of tenderness, in the way he wrote of his cousins, especially of one of them, the eldest, Margaret, with whom it was very plain that old Mr. Hatherley, not without some show of reason, had suspected his son, John, of being in love.

Mark, remembering that his own mother's name was Margaret, had thought that possibly some resemblance in more than the name to his first love, had determined his father's final choice of a wife. Mark recalled his mother very distinctly, her ethereal beauty, her shadowy grace; the charm of her gentleness, the pathos of her affliction; all had remained to him as the most graciously mournful of memories. He had felt her loss as keenly as a reserved and sensitive child could feel; he had cherished the recollection of her all the more that his father had seemed very quickly to forget her. And nobody that Mark had ever met seemed to have known his mother, or was able to tell him anything about her. This mystery, if mystery it was, heightened the poetry of her image in her son's mind; and lately, in reading of this other "Margaret," he had seemed, although he knew it must be fancy, to gain a clearer image of his mother. He sat silent for a few moments, then addressed Mr. Graham:

"These Hatherleys that you knew in America, sir; may I ask where they were living?"

"In Philadelphia."

"Then they were my cousins. There were several daughters?"

"Yes: extremely pretty girls. The eldest, Margaret, was beautiful, but she was unfortunately deaf and dumb."

Mark looked so unaccountably startled that Mr. Graham paused for an instant in sheer surprise, then continued:

"I was a schoolboy still in those days, but I remember thinking her singularly lovely; and there was a curious story about her which interested me. She had been, so to speak, only *lent* to her family."

"Lent?"

"Yes. She had become deaf, and consequently dumb, through some accident; I forget the details, but I know it happened when she was only about two years old. Her father, who up to that moment had adored her as his first-born, took up a most unnatural aversion to her. One has heard of men who possess this shrinking from physical imperfection; sometimes it runs in families."

"It apparently ran very much in ours," said Mark. "My grandfather I know had it, to the same extent probably as his brother."

"Ah! in the case of poor Margaret Hatherley the consequences were less evil than might have been feared. For she touched the heart of a rich eccentric widower, who adopted her and gave her his name. And as the years went on his love for her became a kind of monomania, so that he could not bear people to know that she was not his child. He tried in every way to separate her from her family, and only lent her, as I have said, for a brief space to her dying mother, who had not seen her for years, who had pined for the sight of her, and after many supplications had at last wrung from Mr. Lyndon the permission to see her for a few weeks before he carried her off for ever to England."

"Lyndon! Did you say Lyndon?" interrupted Mark, pale with unusual emotion.

"Yes, that was his name. He really was a little mad. He had never told this girl that she was not his daughter, and would not allow her father and mother to reveal their relationship to her. They were, in her eyes, to pass as great friends of his. I remember how pathetic it was to watch the yearning glance with which Mrs. Hatherley sometimes followed her unconscious daughter, who was very sweet and gentle, but perhaps a little cold; or, possibly, it was not coldness but only her affliction, which always seemed to make her the denizen of another sphere. Her adopted father lived only for her. And I remember her visit to her family was cut short by his jealousy. A young man—also a Hatherley—came out from England, and fell in love with Margaret. He was very indignant at old Lyndon's pretensions, and always said the girl should be enlightened. And he wanted to marry her, but the old man carried her away, and what happened afterwards I never heard."

Mark made no answer: his heart was too full of bitterness. Mr. Graham thought him absent-minded, and turned to Richard. An animated conversation between himself and the latter, in which Dr. Kenyon joined, began about Etruscan coins, theories as to Etruscan speech, and so on: subjects on which Dick was always interested, and interesting. Mark, meanwhile, sat quite mute, for the blow which he had just received was a terrible one. He knew now that all the wealth which his father had first employed, then squandered, and all that by which he himself, in countless advantages of education and up-bringing had benefited, had been obtained through a deception as elaborate as it was base; for even though

in the end Mr. Hatherley might so far have forgiven John's marriage as to leave him a portion of his money, he certainly would never have disinherited his other children in his eldest son's favour, had he known whom that son had taken to wife. He would have objected to Margaret Hatherley on many grounds: first, because, through her mother and (more distantly) through her father she was doubly John's cousin; next because of her affliction; and, finally, because she was the daughter of a man whom he hated.

Mark was proudly and fastidiously upright, with an uprightness that had, perhaps, some alloy of arrogance. It was, therefore, cruelly humiliating to him to feel that for long years his father had wronged and defrauded the people whom Mark, in the midst of his care for them, had disliked and despised. Mrs. Hatherley, Florence, Mary Russell—he had meant to do what he could for them and then dismiss them from his life: now five minutes' conversation—the reminiscences of a stranger—had sufficed to transform these dependents on his bounty into claimants for a retribution far beyond his means! Well—it was a duty the more, a further sacrifice exacted from him—the consummation of his ruin; not one coin of such ill-gotten gains should cling to his fingers—on this he was resolved—and, having once accepted this conclusion, he put all regret away from him with a characteristic, grave serenity. He rose then to go; apologised for his intrusion, and promised to give Mr. Graham news of Lady Hatherley as soon as he should know anything himself.

On getting back to The Limes they received a visit from Mrs. Burton. She had lately been in a state of great exhilaration, having been taken up and patronised by a distant and semi-aristocratic connection of Mr. Burton's, a certain Hon. Mrs. Shirley, who, for reasons of her own, had invited the Vicar's pretty wife to spend a fortnight with her in London. The invitation, coming as it did unexpectedly, had so scattered Mrs. Burton's wits (all that portion of them, that is, not concentrated upon making the most of Mrs. Shirley) that she had actually started for May-fair, leaving behind the half-finished budget of Gertrude's iniquities, that she had been compiling for Winifred. From London she had only found time to despatch sundry little billets full of rapturous hints at one thing, bewildering inuendoes at another, and a forest of notes of admiration in every page. Back at Elmsleigh she had completed the first budget, supplemented it with a further one descriptive of "*dear, refined* Mrs. Shirley," and came now to glean fresh news, if possible, from Dick Dallas.

"How d'ye do?" she said, with an air of languid elegance, copied from her late surroundings. "Lady Hatherley has written, I presume? No! Gone back to Paris, you think? Ah! I hope my dear daughter —— Have I heard from Winifred lately, you say? No; she does not often write. It is the fashion of the present day to be a little forgetful of parents. But I don't complain; she is my sweet child all the same. Dear Mrs. Shirley is most anxious to make her acquaintance."

"Who is Mrs. Shirley?" enquired Dick, provokingly.

"The Honourable Mrs. Shirley, a daughter of Lord Walrush, a most charming, elegant, spirituelle woman; but I think it is very likely you have never heard of her," answered Mrs. Burton, in a tone of ineffable impertinence. "Her acquaintance will be invaluable to my darling child. Winifred is naturally most refined, but her surroundings of late have *not* been everything I could wish."

"I dare say Gerty has gone to her now," remarked Dick, casually.

Mrs. Burton gave a theatrical start.

"I hope not. I mean, of course, that Winifred will give no advice.—Considering her youth and inexperience she is perhaps a little fond of advising; and now that I am not with her, she cannot be too careful. Besides, her life is an austere one: she is devoted to her art. I wish her to be devoted to her art."

"You used always to complain of that," exclaimed Mark, gruffly. But Mrs. Burton ignored this remark. People with inconvenient memories were really too ill-bred!

"Are you soon leaving Elmsleigh?" she asked.

"As soon as everything is sold off. But I shall not go without calling to wish you good-bye, Mrs. Burton. When a fellow is ruined, his chief consolation lies in friendship," answered Mark, with very grim humour.

Mrs. Burton, lost in dreamy contemplation of the prospect from the window, apparently did not hear him. When she took her leave, Dick, opening the door for her, observed airily: "I shall be sure to let you know what news Gerty gives of Winifred."

An elaborate little shudder at his familiarity; a glance from half-closed eyelids, that took him in from the crown of his head to the tips of his boots, and expressed her full sense of his insignificance, were all Mrs. Burton's reply.

"Of all the insufferable pieces of affectation and pretence ——" began Dick, when she was fairly gone.

"Don't waste good abuse on her, my dear fellow; she is not worth it," interrupted Mark.

Later in the evening, a diversion was caused to their thoughts by the entrance of a servant with a telegram. "From Paris," said Mark, and tore it open.

(*To be continued.*)

A CURIOUS PEOPLE.

IN fitting out expeditions and sending out explorers to the uttermost ends of the earth, we have missed a people who come under our very noses, and in such frequent and sometimes daily contact with our household, as materially to interfere with our comfort and ease.

A people strong: the strongest, in proportion to their size, of any created being, not excepting the elephant and gorilla. Intelligent too, with much inventive genius and equal cleverness in execution. Yet withal so differently constituted from ourselves, that in bringing our observation to bear upon their being, we feel as if dropped into another planet, and were contemplating inhabitants whose form, appearance, manners and customs, could never have been conceived by the wildest imagination.

In the first place—to take any member of the race—he is not a biped like a man, nor a quadruped like a horse; but he has six legs, the two foremost being indiscriminately used as arms or legs, as occasion may require. His face has three eyes, disposed in a triangle on the forehead, with which he keeps the sharpest look-out, with a power of vision marvellously far-reaching. He has no nose, and therefore cannot smell; nor is he gifted with ears. Consequently he is both deaf and dumb, and is reduced to communicate with his fellows through the language of touch, and would no doubt have formed an alphabet of fingers like our own deaf and dumb, but that his fore-legs are in constant requisition for walking and running. But kind nature has compensated for this deficiency, by giving him two long, moveable, sensitive fingers planted in his forehead, with which he communicates fully and freely as his will may dictate.

In appearance they are dark in complexion; though even in this they vary from intense black like the negroes, to red like the Indians, tawny like the Egyptians, and even white like ourselves. In figure they are slim, but quite as anomalous in their form as their face is in feature. They have no neck, so to speak; not such as we have, joining head to chest; but they have a long crooked waist which joins the chest to the body, and this takes the form of an inverted *f*.

Fancy such a monster coming right up against one!

What a different notion of beauty these people must have, and if they have a school of design, how strange must be their line and colours!

But I have not described half the wonders. They are a sociable people amongst themselves, and form a most orderly community; so laborious and foreseeing, that even Solomon kindly bestowed eulogiums on them, and held them up as an example to his own subjects.

Their government is monarchical, the strangest in the world. There is none like it, for the sceptre is only given to females, and as marriage

is a royal privilege confined to the sovereign alone, she, the queen, is the only matron in the kingdom, and is, besides, the one, and only, mother of her whole people. Men are despised here because they are given to idleness; and, therefore, when they become useless from age, indisposition, or other causes, they are put to death as criminals. There are only a few of the male sex born within a given epoch. On the other hand women are the dominant sex. They are the majority, the strong, the intelligent, the active, the great workers and contrivers in this most strange and curious nation. It is still the women who nurse, feed, and cater for the young, all born of the queen mother; also who educate them and bring them up. It is the women who sow, reap, garner up stores for the winter, who build cities and walls, highways, covered ways, tunnels, and smooth roads; who lay out pastures and cultivate grounds, and form altogether a people of such surprising faculties that they have at length attracted the attention of some of our greatest men of the day, and would surely have come into notice long ago, but for their diminutive size. So small, that the Lilliputians of Swift might crunch them under foot like sand. So small that it requires very close attention indeed to ascertain their exact form. So small that it is only by the persistent use of the microscope that one obtains any certain knowledge of their habits and manners.

It is not only what our cleverest philosophers have written about them, not from hearsay alone, that I speak, but from what I myself have seen in peregrinations in other lands.

We were travelling in that land of teeming prodigious life, Central America, and were camped in a glade bordering a grand old virgin forest, so marvellously rich in strange forms and colours of vegetable life that we should have lingered long in this spot to admire, but that we were driven by a sudden shower to take shelter in a deserted shed or house, left, probably, by some planter who had migrated to another spot: a not unusual case. The roof, resting on two stone walls, was covered with wooden shingles, on which the rain came pattering down with a noise like thunder. There was nothing for it but to wait till it was over. There we sat, dismal and woe-begone, some of the party squat on the folds of a spread hammock, others on bags which the mules had carried, and one of us on a three-legged stool, most opportunely fished out from a dark corner where it had lain hidden. There we sat, contemplating the rainfall outside and the walls within, one of which had a crack in it a good foot in width at the bottom. But running up in an oblique line away to the left hand side towards the top, it became smaller and smaller as it rose, till from a mere line it vanished to nothing. This crack had been the work of an earthquake, a frequent occurrence in those regions, and been left in that state by the last tenant when he flitted.

We sat watching this crack, and, for want of something better

to do, commenting and surmising, when suddenly our attention was caught by some live thing, as it appeared to us, issuing from a hole in the ground close up under the wall, midway between the crack and the right hand corner. In another minute it had beat upwards, and was taking the direction up the wall. Out it came, longer and longer. We thought it would never stop unfolding. Was it a snake? Everyone started at the bare thought. We watched it at a respectful distance.—No! it was a huge scolopendra, full a foot and half long. We have these creatures in our own European gardens, but they are small, perhaps three inches at most. But this one was a monster, and the whole party were instantly on their feet to give it chase and knock it over, when someone uttered a note of surprise and invited us to stop and examine its mode of progress.

I should explain, that the natural gait of this reptile when in movement is serpentine; its multitudinous legs rising and falling in quick succession, like a series of small waves, very pretty to look at when near. But this creature did not seem to use its legs at all, but slid up the wall as if pulled up by some invisible string. Everyone exclaimed with surprise, and on closer inspection the riddle was solved.

The monster was dead, and was impelled up the wall not by a string, but by the serried ranks of thousands of little black ants fringing the sides, which they shoved up by slanting their bodies, as we ourselves should under the same circumstances; also at the head which they were pulling, and at the tail which they were pushing; and all this with an unanimity of aim and action, and an intelligence of the work they had undertaken, and all in so perfect and beautiful order that it won the admiration of our whole party. No set of human beings could do it better.

They had already gained half way up the hut. On went the procession, swift and smooth, without a break or pause, till they came to the fault I have already described in the wall. The crack here measured a full inch wide; they could not bridge it over. They halted, and I, moved by the most intense curiosity, mounted on the three-legged stool to watch.

It was then I discovered that on the back of the dead reptile were stationed some half-dozen loose ants, running about hither and thither, in a state of the greatest agitation and excitement, looking down at the workers on this side then on the opposite side—then along the body to the head—back again to the tail and so on; while one little fellow, not a whit different from the rest, kept stationary on the extreme highest point of the head. He was evidently the captain and commander-in-chief: and though not differing from the others in form and colour as far as we could see, yet no doubt elected for the position from his superior intelligence. The rent here was so wide, so impossible to get over, that I fully expected they would have let go their booty and it had fallen to the ground. But not a hair's-breadth did they budge—the stout-hearted

little creatures held on as steady as our own troops in battle, immovable as a post; and this for some fraction of a minute. Then at some sign of command, invisible and unintelligible to us, the whole procession moved backwards (that is downwards) for about the space of a foot. Then came another halt, and then again the whole body recommenced their march upwards; only this time it took a sloping line parallel with the crack in the wall, evidently aiming at the place where the rent dwindled away to nothing. And they reached it, too; they crossed it; they came to the top, and we saw the body of the dead reptile bending over the top of the wall, as it gradually disappeared under the rafters which supported the roof.

The whole scene impressed itself on my mind as one to ponder and reflect upon. For the movement showed not only a skilful combination of forces, of rare generalship on the part of the commander, worthy of a human hero—but an obedience on the part of the workers which might rival the best drilled army in the world; and we cannot but recognise in those small creatures an amount of intelligence which may rank on a par with many nations and people which we call human.

At another time I witnessed a scene not less interesting. It was a battle. It took place on the broad slab outside our window. The fight itself was over; and the red ants, who were the invaders, were taking the black ants prisoners and carrying them off as slaves. How did they do this?

They did not chain or handcuff their prisoners as we should. They took an easier method. They had possessed themselves of a thread from a spider's web, portions of which they adroitly tied round the body of the captive, while a red ant, each one holding an end, pulling it with equal force and at equal distance, thus managed to avoid the sting of the prisoner, as they dragged it along; unmindful of its unavailing struggles and wriggles to escape.

I was wondering how they managed to tie the thread round the prisoner's body, when I spied a little group of red ants busy over the insensible body of a black ant forced in a corner, and I suppose paralysed with the injected burning poison of their conquerors' sting. And so it happens that Nature offers to the candid student new wonders every day, unfolding to our view proofs incontestable that she dispenses her gifts irrespective of size, form, class of life and even race. And we are moved, in thinking of the Great Creator of all these wonders, to exclaim with awe and reverence at every step of our way, even when contemplating so small a thing as the ant.

M. F. W.

FLOSS.

By the Author of "Mrs. Jerningham's Journal."

"IS there a doctor in the house?"

These words were uttered by a girl's voice, and sounded, to my ears, in eager, piteous tones.

I was just going to begin my dinner, and had stuck the fork into the breast of a roast duck, preparatory to transferring the best part of that very tempting bird to my plate. I had been travelling all day, and was much more inclined, at the present moment, to eat, drink, and be comfortable, than for any active employment. My quarters were not bad, being in a well-known little inn, at L——, in Guernsey, to which island I had run over on business. After having transacted it, I was taking mine ease by exploring the whole island in the shortest possible time, and tiring myself to death thereby.

"Is there a doctor in the house?" repeated the girl's voice, and this time the accents were impatient, almost despairing.

I was dining alone in the coffee-room, the door of which stood open into the hall from whence the girl's voice sounded, the fork remained in the duck's breast, and my hand suspended above it, while I listened for the reply.

"No, there isn't; but there is Dr. le Noir in the village, in the first street to your right"

"Dr. le Noir is out. He won't be back to-day. Oh, he will die! he will die! What shall I do?" cried the young, despairing voice.

Up I jumped, and left my dinner.

"I am a doctor," I said, appearing at the open door of the room, with my napkin in my hand. She sprang forward.

"Oh, I am glad!" she cried. "Come with me this minute, or he will die. Do not lose an instant." She said this with the utmost imperiousness.

"Only to get my hat," I replied, meekly, quite subdued by her tyranny. Or was it her wonderful beauty that subdued me? for indeed it was a vision of most extraordinary beauty that greeted my eyes as I entered the hall.

A young girl, not more than sixteen or seventeen years old, in a white frock, with a black lace mantilla over her shoulders and head; beneath this mantilla, coil after coil of golden hair—real gold, for it was not brown or auburn at all—twisted round and round her head. And then again, under this magnificent amount of hair, such a face! Slightly oval and rather small, a complexion of milk and roses—if ever that similitude could be fairly used for a complexion—delicate, charming little features, a mouth that, having once seen, one could

not take one's eyes off, with its pretty dimples, and cleft chin. Eyebrows—I am always very particular about eyebrows—a golden brown, many shades darker than the hair. And then, as she turned her eyes full upon me, in her eagerness, I declare I was startled, and I am not sure that at the first moment I was agreeably startled. For, though they were everything that eyes—taken by themselves as eyes—should be, in that face, and with those surroundings of colour, they were almost incongruous: at least, at first sight they made you jump. They were almond shaped, brilliant, soft, liquid; everything, that is, most beautiful in eyes; but they were dark—quite dark; not even hazel, but deep brown; and their lashes were nearly black. But they ought to have been blue—the eyes I mean; there can be no doubt about that; and not even violet blue; china blue—baby blue is what they ought to have been; and I actually did almost jump when I saw them.

However, be they what colour they might, there was no resisting them in their eagerness, their hope, their despair; and having received one look from them, I was in as great a hurry as she could be. I seized my hat, and cried, "Come along." At which she instantly set off, and ran out of the house, and I ran after her.

Thus we proceeded for some way, till she, if not I, lost breath, and then perforce we slackened our pace.

"What is the matter with him?" I asked.

"He has had a *dreadful* fall. He is hurt."

"How long ago? Has any one attended to him? Is he sensible?"

"Early this morning. He came to me. He could hardly stand or speak. I got him to bed. Someone had tied up his shoulder, but it began to bleed, and he said I must call a doctor. I had *wanted* to do it before. He wouldn't let me, but now he is as eager for one as I am.—Oh! oh!"

All this was said in little broken sentences, partly from want of breath, and partly from anxiety and flurry of spirits; and the "Oh, oh," at the end was the most pitiful sound I ever heard.

"Well, well," I replied, soothingly, "a hurt in the shoulder is nothing dreadful; we'll soon set him up."

She gave me the sweetest smile, and such a flashing glance of her astonishing eyes, that again they really made me jump. As she turned her face towards me, that she might thus thank me, I noticed —I hardly know why I noticed it, but it somehow made an impression on me—a soft little brown mole on the left cheek, below the temple: a thorough beauty spot.

Meantime, she led me rapidly on, till we were more than a mile from my inn. We had long left anything that could be called a high road, and, after crossing fields, were in a narrow lane; till, in a lonely wooded spot, with a view of the blue sea stretched below it, we came on a farmhouse, snugly nestled under a hill.

She led me straight in, through a sort of empty hall—I don't think it was a kitchen—up a staircase, and then, without a moment's pause, ran before me into a large, low-ceiling bedroom.

"I have one, dearest—I have brought him. Oh! how are you? How white you look!"

Verily he did look white. I followed closely behind her, and beheld an old-fashioned tent bedstead at the far end of the chamber, with check curtains, within which lay a young man. He could not be more than one and twenty, and he was a handsome fellow—or, at least, he would be such, I felt sure, when in a little less cadaverous condition. But his face was as white as the pillow on which his head was laid, and the dark hair and whiskers made it appear still more ghastly. He looked like a man who had lost a great quantity of blood, and he glared about him in that peculiar, restless, asking way (with a pair of very fine dark eyes) which may be noticed in cases where there has been violent hæmorrhage, whether of an internal or external nature. I did not like his looks, and was afraid there must be a good deal the matter.

"Oh, all right," he cried, "I am delighted you are come. Now, my own darling, you must leave us for a minute" —— to the girl.

"No, Charlie; whatever I do, I can't do that. I *can't* leave you; *don't* send me away."

"Well, my sweetest, look out of the window at that end of the room, then. I can't have you see ugly bruises. I will call you the minute you can be of use. Look out now; you *must* do what I tell you."

"Yes, dear," she replied, quite meekly, and, turning her back on him, obeyed his order.

He directed his quick restless eyes towards me then, with a world of meaning in them, which I could not in the least understand, and said, in a raised voice, still looking at me with all this significance:

"I had a fall—a nasty fall—from a bit of cliff, you know, and fell somehow on a sharp stone, as you'll see. It's bleeding like the very deuce!"

He dropped his voice, as he uttered the last words, and, still keeping his eyes fixed on me, drew down the bed-clothes with his right hand. Removing some cloths saturated in blood from the left shoulder, displayed a neat little round hole, as evidently made by a bullet as possible.

"It only began to bleed half an hour ago," he said, as our eyes met, and his commanded silence.

"I see!" I answered very slowly. "Is—*it*—in it?"

"The stone?" he cried hastily; "no, it is not. I got it out a little while back."

And, in a sly, surreptitious way, he lifted a bullet and showed it me under the clothes.

I was very much surprised at the quantity of blood that had been

lost, as bullet wounds are never accompanied by much bleeding; but I soon perceived that there was a cut by the side.

"What's this?" I cried. "This is where the blood comes from."

"I tried to cut it out myself," he answered, with a rather shame-faced look, and a little burst of laughter; and then he fainted away.

I was not sorry he had fainted, as it enabled me, without hurting him, to ascertain the extent of the mischief. I dressed the wounds, and did all that was necessary, stopping the bleeding without much difficulty. I then recovered him with brandy from my own pocket flask, and all without his obedient sister, or—what?—could this young creature be his wife?—stirring from her post at the window, or knowing anything about either the fainting fit or the wound.

He opened his eyes, and looked strangely about him.

"Good gracious!" he said; "what *is* the matter? What business have you in the room? Floss—my darling—where's Floss?"

She was at the bedside in an instant.

"Here, dearest, here; can I do anything for you?"

"Oh, I remember!" he said, slowly; "no, my pet, you can't do anything; I'm all right."

And his eyes interrogated mine, as if asking whether he *was* all right.

"Yes," I answered then; "you'll do very well, only you must keep yourself quite quiet, you know. You mustn't stir hand or foot, and you must have somebody to nurse you."

"I shall nurse him," cried the young girl, proudly."

"Excuse me; you are too young—and inexperienced. Have you anyone with you?—your parents, perhaps?" I spoke doubtfully, and said the words as a test.

They both laughed, and she blushed all over her pretty face, while even my patient's white cheeks had a sudden colour in them.

"Not exactly," he replied drily; "we are—alone."

Then they exchanged looks, and their souls were in their eyes.

"I had better try and get a nurse from the village," I said.

"Indeed, no!" cried the girl. "No one shall nurse him but me, —shall they, Charlie? Oh, say that they shall not.—I'll go back to school if you don't!"

He laughed again. There was a gay, careless look about him, notwithstanding his suffering state, that made laughter seem natural.

"Hush!" he interrupted with a look of amusement, but with a trifle of anxiety in it, also, as she finished her speech. "But indeed I think"—to me—"we had best do without the nurse; it would be awkward; it wouldn't *do*—would it, Flossy?"

A whole volume of tenderness was in his voice when he addressed her.

"It would *not* do," she answered, with a half laugh, and another glance that met and mingled with his in its loving significance. "Besides which, no creature shall nurse you but myself. I wonder at

anyone proposing such a thing," she added, with some indignation, and then a side flash out of her eyes at me, which made me feel like a culprit.

"Well," I said, "it may last some time, this nursing, and I think a sister or a friend, or a professional nurse, would be a help. There is nothing to be done to-night but to keep quiet, and I will send you a composing draught. I never travel without a small medicine chest, in case of accident, so I can make up something that will do."

"My *dear* Charlie, what can you want with a composing draught?" asked the girl, in innocent amazement.

"He means something to make me sleep, dear," was the reply, given in an explanatory manner, which seemed to reflect on me, not her, for her want of understanding.

"As if you wouldn't sleep without it!"

"Well, you see, after a tumble, they sometimes don't sleep, do they, doctor?"

"No," I replied, shortly, "they don't."

"But I don't want anyone coming prying here from the inn or the village," said Charlie. "I think I'll take my chance of sleeping to-night, please; and to-morrow, if you kindly pay me a visit, you can bring me a lot of physic; composing draughts, and all the rest of it."

"I'll go back with him, dear, and bring you the dose," said Floss. "I'll run all the way. I'll be no time."

"No, darling; I won't have you out so late at night by yourself."

"And then he can't sleep," she said, and turned her magnificent eyes on me quite reproachfully, as if it was my fault. I immediately said I would bring back the sleeping draught myself; and, as I spoke, for the first time since I left it, I remembered the roast duck, with the fork stuck in its breast.

She took the offer rather coolly, as if it was the most natural thing in the world that everyone who came across Charlie should be ready or eager to serve him. But he said very civilly: "Really that is extremely kind of you: it is a great deal of trouble to take for a stranger. But I say, doctor, how soon shall I be on my legs again?"

"In a month or six weeks, I daresay."

The young couple exchanged looks of consternation.

"But *that* isn't possible," he cried.

"Oh, Charlie, Charlie! why the holidays ——" she was exclaiming, when a look from him stopped her.

"Well," I said, "I daresay you have a strong constitution, and you don't look as if you'd taken much out of yourself; if you are very careful, and there are no drawbacks, you may make wonderful progress in a fortnight."

"That's nearer the mark," he said.

"But only think of having to spend it in bed," she cried.

"It *is* a sell," added Charlie, and then they both laughed. After that, I took my leave, promising to return before long with the

medicine. But when I was out of reach of those astonishing eyes, I discovered that I was extremely hungry, and resolved that I would finish my dinner before I did anything else.

I blessed my landlord with a loud voice when I found that he had actually kept the said dinner hot for me, and I enjoyed my duck none the less for the little adventure which had taken me out of its presence. While I did so, I made up my mind to ask no questions of anyone about Charlie and Floss. They might be an orthodox ordinary bride and bridegroom; but even then, they would rather blush unseen for a little while; and if, as I strongly suspected, they were a runaway couple, it would be the height of cruelty to put anyone on their track, as even the most innocent questions might do. That they were gentlefolk there could be no doubt, and I had an idea that Charlie was military; though, of course, it was only an idea. But how in the world had he received that wound? and why did he make all this mystery about it? Why was the poor little bride to suppose it was a fall he suffered from, and not a wound? Was she another man's wife, and had her husband followed,and fought with Charlie? The idea was too ridiculous to be entertained for a moment. Her extreme youth, and the purity and innocence of her appearance and expression, equally forbade it. I shuddered when I thought how easily the wound, which I really hoped would prove of little consequence, might have been a dangerous one—and then the idiot trying to get out the bullet and wounding himself as he had done! Why, it might have cost him his life.

After dinner I mixed a sleeping-draught, and took it myself to the farm. The young lady ran down to the door to me; she looked quite gay now, and lovelier than ever in her recovered spirits.

"He is quite himself," she cried, "but he does not want to see you to-night. Oh, I wasn't to have said that! I was to have made some excuse, but you won't be affronted, will you?" in such a coaxing way that I would have defied St. Senanus himself to have slighted her. "I'll *make* him see you to-morrow, if it is necessary."

"I am not in the least affronted. Patients do sometimes take a dislike to their doctors," I replied, smiling down at the charming upturned face.

"Oh, it isn't *that;* he has not taken the *least* dislike to you. Why should he? I am sure you are very nice," she cried, eagerly, and then added with the utmost simplicity: "It is only that he is afraid you might ask questions."

"Well," I said, laughing outright, partly at the innocent compliment, and partly at the naïve honesty with which she gave his reason; "he need not be afraid. I will come and see him to-morrow, and I will not ask him a single question—except, of course, such as concern his health."

"Thank you," she answered, very earnestly. "I'll tell him so, and then he won't mind."

But she stopped abruptly, even as she spoke, and added: "No, I

can't, for I ought not to have let out that that was the reason. I was to manage to prevent your coming up without your knowing why. How stupid I am!"

She looked at me, our eyes met, and she instantly saw the drollery of her confessions; we both laughed.

"However," she said, "it can't be helped now. It is very awkward having anything to conceal, isn't it? I suppose if one was older one would manage better. But there is no harm done; you say you'll not ask questions, and you'll not tell, will you?" very coaxingly.

"Not tell?"

"I mean you'll not tell anybody about us?"

And she sidled nearer to me, and looked in my face with child-like entreaty. How beautiful she was, and what wonderful eyes she had!

"No," I cried, "upon my honour as a gentleman, I won't."

"How I do like you," she said, with the sweetest naïveté. "What a number of nice people there are in the world. I can't *think* what Sarah Fielding means by saying there are not. It seems to me the more one meets the more one likes. Don't you agree with me?"

"At this moment I certainly do."

"Oh," she said, catching my meaning more from my manner, I think, than my words, "you like *me?*" and she blushed a little, as a child might do if you praised it.

"He will wonder why I am staying so long, so I must go back to him. Good-night, and thank you very much. You'll be sure to come to-morrow."

And so we parted. She ran upstairs, and I started home through the darkness of the summer night. I was very much interested in my young couple: in him, perhaps, more for her sake than for his own, though he was a fine young fellow, and I could not believe there was any harm in him. I wished I had looked at her left hand, and noticed whether the third finger bore the little gold circlet—so small a thing in itself, but carrying so large a history along with it.

The next morning I went to the farm-house about twelve o'clock. It was a charming day, and the walk was a pleasure in itself. Having reached my destination, I tapped at the door, and entered. She sprang from the bed, on which she had been sitting by his side, and ran forward to meet me.

"He is much better," were her eager words. "He slept as soundly as ever he could do, last night, and says his shoulder hurts him very little."

"She would sit up," said his voice from the bed. "She was drinking green tea all night to keep her awake, foolish child! She will be tired to death, and make herself ill, by way of pleasing *me!* Do, doctor, I beg of you, tell her not to do it again; tell her it is not necessary."

"It will do her no harm once in a way," I said, smiling in answer

to her pleading eyes. "I have known young ladies sometimes—and so, I daresay, have you—dance a whole night through, without being one bit the worse for it next day."

She clapped her hands together at this, and even gave a little jump of joy.

"Oh, you dear doctor!" she cried. "To be sure he has! There, Charlie, you'll be a good boy now, won't you?"

But, as she clapped her hands, I saw the third finger of the left, and round it was the slender band of gold on which the weal or woe of her life depended. It was protected by a golden snake with diamond eyes, and an emerald crest. I did not like the idea of a snake twined about that wedding ring; still, my heart felt quite at rest now, and I was really glad.

With unmixed feelings of friendliness, I examined my patient, heard his account of himself, and drew my own conclusions of his state, which were quite satisfactory. "You have a capital constitution," I told him, "and will be about again sooner than I expected."

"Yes, but how soon?" asked his wife—that such a child as that should have taken the cares of wifehood upon herself!—"but how soon? He is getting so tired of it, poor fellow."

"The poor fellow must have a little patience," I replied. "Every liberty he takes with himself now will only confine him longer. A grain of patience at present will prevent the necessity of an ounce by-and-by."

"Oh, I shall do very well," he said, cheerfully. "I am very well nursed." And again the eyes met, and told their own history, so that he who ran might read.

"Have you books or papers?" I asked. "You may be read to, you know, but I am afraid there is no library within reach."

"We muster a book or two between us, don't we, Floss?"

"Oh yes, dear, I'm sure we do: I know I've got "Taylor's Holy Living and Dying," that Aunt Jane gave me: it's so beautifully bound I didn't like to leave it behind; and you've all Shelley, you know—you got him for a shilling at the railway stall, and you bought a *Queen*, too, that I haven't looked at even."

"A capital library," he cried, laughing; "we shall do very well—for you see, doctor," with a little shame-faced laugh, "we have so much to say to each other we haven't *much* time for reading."

"Of course, we've a great deal to say to each other, both of us," she cried; "when we've lived years and years in the world. Why, he's twenty one, and I am very nearly seventeen, and we've only known each other ——"

"Hush, hush!" he interrupted her, holding up a warning first finger.

"Oh, yes, dear, I'll hush; I'm always forgetting. But I know I should not just as much as you do, and mean not; it is only that I forget."

She seemed so anxious to be forgiven that he was obliged to say, "Never mind, sweetest," though he looked slightly worried—as much, I am sure, by her excuses, as by the original offence—and glanced askance at me, to see what I thought of it.

As for me, I preserved an impenetrable countenance, and, to all appearances, was as little interested as if I was visiting Mr. and Mrs. Smith Robinson, in Baker Street, or Bedford Square, and everything was as common-place and correct as it could be.

I think she took my imperturbability quite as a matter of course, and had no idea there was any reason why I might look otherwise, but Mister Charlie was better informed. I could see that he felt grateful to me, and had even no objection that I should perceive that he was so, for when I came to take leave of him, he gave me a speaking look of thanks, while he thrust a double fee into my hand.

"But, perhaps, I am still in your debt," he said; "for that was quite a sort of a surgical operation yesterday.

But I refused to take any fee; and when he pressed it on me, I explained to him that I could not do so in an accidental case of this nature, outside my usual practice.

"The fact is," I said, "I was an army surgeon in India, and though I do practise as a physician in London, it is really only because I want something to do. I heard your—wife"—I hesitated a moment on the word, and both my companions laughed a little, and blushed a good deal, when I uttered it: it was not yet a familiar word to either as applied to one of them—"I heard your wife in distress for a doctor, and unable to find one, and I came to help in an emergency if I could. By-and-by I shall have to turn you over to Dr. le Noir, and then will come the time for fees.

"Dr. le Noir be hanged," replied my patient, coolly. "But I really am exceedingly obliged to you—I am indeed. I think you have been extremely kind."

"And didn't I tell you so, Charlie," cried Floss, with airy triumph. "Did not I tell you so, when you said ——"

"Hush, hush, my love," he interrupted, hastily, and I wondered whether he would for ever be having to hush his beautiful wife, and if so, how long would he consider it as a pleasant jest.

The next morning I was expecting letters, and as there was no post-office at the little village where my inn was, I walked to fetch them myself to the post-office about a mile off—farther indeed—and at least two miles from the farm-house; yet there, to my surprise, I found my fair new friend before me.

"He is much better," she cried, ere I had time to speak, evidently thinking she could not be soon enough in giving me such news as that. "He is much better; he slept like a top all night, and was quite in a state to get his breakfast this morning."

"And how are you yourself, if you will allow me to ask you?"

"Oh, I'm perfectly well, thank you."

Indeed she looked so. The very picture of pure yet refined health, and always smiling. I thought hers was a face of the sweetest happiness I had ever beheld.

"And I hope you slept last night? for, though I took your side yesterday, I must tell you that I do not consider sleepless nights at all good for you."

"I don't want what's good for me, thank you. What is good for one is always nasty, from medicine upwards. But I really got a good deal of sleep in an arm-chair—I did indeed; and it's rather amusing sleeping in an arm chair, you *are* so puzzled when you wake to know where you are, and what you mean by it."

Surely, I thought, they must have been properly married, with a breakfast and a trousseau, and all the rest of it! Could she be so entirely free from care or regret if there had been an unsanctioned elopement? And yet, if not, why all this mystery? I was greatly puzzled about them, and my puzzle got only more intricate the more I saw of them. Who were they, and what had they done? I felt bound in honour, by a tacit understanding, for which his eyes had thanked me, to ask no questions; but I had never been so much interested by strangers, or more anxious to pierce a mystery, or less able to do so, than I was now.

The post arrived while we yet waited, and my letters were handed to me. One was given to her also. I wondered what address was on it. She looked at it eagerly.

"It is the one he expected," she said, smiling with pleasure; "how glad he'll be! It's money, and it was getting so inconvenient not having any—you can't think! But we hadn't an idea, either of us, how much we should want, and so didn't bring near enough; and in Paris he *would* buy me lots of things."

"In Paris," I said, involuntarily; perhaps here was a clue. Yet they were both of them English—possibly *she* might be French, though: there was a pretty little accentuation, not common, in her way of speaking that might be foreign.

"Mademoiselle is French, perhaps?" I asked, with a courtly Parisian bow.

"No. Mademoiselle is ——" She stopped, put her pretty hands before her mouth as to keep the words in. "Monsieur was not to ask questions," she added, roguishly, and dropped me a curtsey.

I opened my letters, and found a summons to return to London at once. My first thought was for her. I must leave these two children behind me, to whom I had been intending "to enact Providence" for a time.

I told her I must go, but that I would send Monsieur le Noir to her husband. Even in the shock and perplexity that the idea of my departure evidently gave her, she paused to blush and laugh a little, at the sound of the unaccustomed words "your husband," and repeated them softly to herself, as if they were a pleasant play.

Then she cried: "But he said he wouldn't see Monsieur le Noir. Oh, don't go away, please."

She put up her lip like a child, and looked ready to cry. I was excessively sorry, and told her so. But I could not help myself. Go I must. I walked back to the farm with her from the post-office. Charlie was refractory. He struck me as accustomed to have his own way; but, when I told him he must obey for his wife's sake, he yielded. His face expressed nothing but tenderness when I spoke of her. The boy looked honest, why should she not be happy? Why should not he always love her and treat her well?

It occurred to me I might send a telegram to London, and follow it myself in the boat that started the next night, and when I proposed this, both the young people appeared pleased.

She asked me if I had ever been in Guernsey before, and when I said no, she cried: "No more have we. Isn't it odd we came at the same time? Everything is so lucky, isn't it?"

"Yes, my getting a bul—I mean my falling off the cliff—was confoundedly lucky, wasn't it?" agreed her husband.

She looked a little puzzled at that, but soon conquered the difficulty, and made the circumstances fit to her theory.

"Of course, dear, that *happened*, and so it could not be helped; but then it was such luck that *he* was here,"—with the prettiest possible little sign at me—" to take care of you. But things *do* fit in so! Oh, Charlie, do you remember our first meeting?"

"It is not so very long ago, Floss, that I need forget it."

"Yes, but the wonderful way in which it was brought about?"

He looked at me, and we exchanged a smile, as we might have done at the innocent prattle of a child.

"That's telling, Floss!" he said, laughing.

"Oh, it's tiresome that everything is telling," she cried, pouting. "How nice it will be when we *may* tell!"

"It does not do thinking, my pet—we must take our happiness, and not think, or it will be clouded."

"That is rather a—reckless view of life, is it not?" asked I.

He laughed.

"May be so," he said, "but what are the odds? My philosophy is to do what I like without thinking, for fear I should not do it, if I thought."

Floss laughed at that, and evidently considered it extremely clever.

"I don't think you'll find that philosophy answer in the long run, though," I remarked.

"Oh, why do you say that?" she cried, rather pitifully; "are not you happy? We are, and we mean to be so, always—don't we, Charlie?"

"Always and always," replied he. "Are you married, doctor?"

I was obliged to confess that I was not.

"Ah, that accounts for it," he cried, with his gay, boyish laugh: "that is why you are glum and grumpy."

"Only, I don't think he is glum and grumpy—do you, Charlie?" she said, doubtfully.

"Only a grumpy bachelor, Floss. When he marries he will begin to enjoy himself."

"Oh, Charlie, but you enjoyed yourself before you—before *that*. I could not bear to think that you had not been always happy."

She spoke so earnestly and piteously that no man in his senses could have admitted he had ever been otherwise.

After a little more chat, I left them to their happiness, which was delicious, notwithstanding his wounded shoulder. I am not at all sure that she did not think that the fall had been sent in order that they might have the pleasure of nursing and being nursed.

I thought about them a great deal that evening, and on the following day I took Monsieur le Noir to the farmhouse. I was delighted to find my patient better than I had expected, and, when I took my leave, I had no anxiety about him, and announced to him that in a few days he might get up, and in a week would be about almost as usual. I was pleased at the affectionate manner in which they bid me good-bye.

"I hope our paths will cross, and that we may meet again," I said. But he looked a little queer at that.

"Ah, how is it going to be?" he cried; "it does not do to look forward. You know my philosophy: Be happy while you may."

And so we parted, and I really do not think that the beautiful girl herself had excited more interest in me than her young husband had. There was something taking and attractive about him, the wherefore of which I hardly understood myself.

II.

FOUR years have glided by since the events that I have just narrated. At first, I often thought of Charlie and Floss, but as nothing happened in all that time to recall them to my mind, I may, by the end of them, be said to have forgotten them.

I was travelling in America when I heard that one of my best and oldest friends, Sir Marmaduke Heathcote, had by the death of an elder brother, inherited a family property, and left India to establish himself in England. I was very much attached to Heathcote, though he had the reputation of being a hard man, and he had a way of making people very much afraid of him. He was obstinate certainly, but then, as he was generally in the right, that was not of much consequence.

He had been settled in Dorsetshire for nearly a year, before, soon after my return to London from New York, I received the following letter from my old friend.

"DEAR DASHWOOD,—It will give us great pleasure to see you at Lowlands as soon as you can manage to come. I rejoiced to hear of your return, as I now hope you will be present at my daughter's marriage next month. And I *did* regret the prospect of your not being there. She has been long engaged to Edmond Fairfax, Lord Fairfax's eldest son, and we are all very busy preparing for the happy event. Send me a line to say when we may expect you, and pray arrange to stay over the wedding. Yours affectionately,

"MARMADUKE HEATHCOTE."

A soldier, every inch of him, and a widower. I had never thought of Heathcote as a family man, though I knew he had children in England when I was with him at Madras. He never spoke of them, and I could not even make up my mind whether he had more than this one daughter. It seemed strange to me to think of paying him a visit on the occasion of a child's marriage; yet he had strong affections, and I could fancy his taking great pleasure in family life, though perhaps in so stern and silent a manner that he might not give much in return.

Be that as it might, he had certainly the power of exciting strong affections in friends of his own sex, and I felt very happy when I took my seat in the train for N——, the nearest station to Lowlands—on as fine a summer day as a man need wish to see.

I had only one companion, a young man, opposite to me, of gentlemanly and even fashionable appearance, his face clean-shaved, except for a tiny moustache, his hair cut as short as it could be, unless his head had been shaved like his chin. All as correct as possible. He appeared a little tired and languid, which was quite correct also, and leant back in his corner with closed eyes.

Afterwards, we were both reading our respective newspapers, and I could not keep silence, for I came on a terrible divorce case in high life. I had known both husband and wife—had been at their wedding, and acted the part of best man to the bridegroom. I found he knew the couple afterwards, and we discussed the miserable affair.

We took different views of it, and argued rather hotly. I declared that the marriage could not prove a happy one, and that poor Nichols had no one to thank but himself, for he had known Lady Jane did not care for him, and had only married to please her friends.

"What can a man expect when a girl marries him to please her friends, and not herself?" I concluded: and, strange as it was, I declare I thought my companion blushed.

"I don't go along with you there," he said. "I'm not sure that I am an advocate for much love on the lady's side before marriage." And a curious expression flitted across his face as he spoke.

I expressed my surprise, and remarked that there will be little enough after it, then, in nine cases out of ten.

"I don't admire 'all for love and the world well lost,' the 'where is

he,' business. It's well enough on the stage; but in real life—well, I suspect, real life is rather—*nicer*—without it."

"A man," I said, "who marries a woman without her heart is an ass. I did all I could to prevent Nichols's marriage, and see how it has ended."

"A man who can't win a woman's heart after marriage, I grant you is an ass," was his reply. "I'll bet two to one it was there Nichols failed."

"But if she has no heart to be won? what if it is already given away?"

"Oh," he cried, with quite an air of relief, and a little easy laugh—he had been curiously in earnest before—"Oh, I cry you mercy—that is altogether different—I give in to you *there*—if there is another lover the man *is* an ass. The case I was contemplating was quite different—it was simply of a young undemonstrative lady, not eager to rush out of her old home into a new one—not as much in love as her lover." And then he hummed lightly,

"When a lady elopes,
On a ladder of ropes,
She may go to—Hongkong—for me."

"That is an extreme case," I replied; "though, for the romance of the thing, a little romance beforehand is not to be despised."

"I don't like romance," he replied, drily.

We continued arguing, of course neither of us convincing the other, till, as the train slackened its pace at N——, we found that we were both going to get out there, and a few more words exchanged showed that both were going to Lowlands. I expressed my satisfaction at the coincidence.

But again an odd expression passed momentarily across his face—again vanishing as quickly as it came, leaving that face to its natural or acquired expression so completely as to be second nature, impassiveness. I thought he shrank from the idea of finishing the discussion under our own names, and wished it had never been begun.

I introduced myself as Dr. Dashwood; but when he said, with a little smile, that he was Edmond Fairfax, of whom he supposed I had heard, I was completely taken by surprise. As we drove out together, I felt rather queer when I thought of the side he had taken in the argument, on a rather delicate subject, for a man so soon to be married to discuss. And were not his views a little curious for a man in his position to hold? What did it mean? Was Miss Heathcote not in love with him, and was he intending to win her affections after the wedding-day, instead of before? or, was she a fast young lady, and showed her affections a little *too* plainly?"

Those flashes of expression that came across his fashionably impassive countenance must mean something in a man on the brink of matrimony. The future Lady Fairfax was, beyond a doubt, either a

shade too empressée, or a shade not empressée enough, in her manners.

He talked very pleasantly as we drove along, evidently receiving me as Sir Marmaduke's special friend, to be treated with friendly respect by Sir Marmaduke's future son-in-law. He was undoubtedly a very agreeable young fellow. He impressed me most favourably, and I found myself hoping that Miss Heathcote was neither hopelessly slow or fearfully fast.

But here we are at the house, and I can think of nothing but my old friend, who I see standing there, on the steps, looking remarkably well, and wonderfully little changed since I saw him last. A little greyer, perhaps, but that only made his keen dark eyes glance keener and darker than ever, from under their shaggy brows.

We were thoroughly happy to see each other again, and I thought he would have shaken my hand off. The foreign fashion of embracing must sometimes be a comfort to men. He welcomed me warmly, and still grasped my hand in his, while he extended his other to Mr. Fairfax.

He took me straight to his own little study, where we plunged at once into old days' talk. "I have only half-an-hour to give you," he said, looking at his watch, evidently as punctual and methodical as ever, though no longer commander of a division; "then I have two men coming on business, and shan't see you again till dinner time."

And when I was obliged to leave him, we had not found a moment for discussing the present; not a word of the wedding, or his daughters, or Mr. Fairfax: we had only talked of the past. He directed me to the garden, where I should find his daughter; but, though I sought the place, she was not there. But Mr. Fairfax was, rather to my surprise, alone and smoking—a lover who had arrived only half-an-hour!

"Sir Marmaduke thought I should find his daughter here," I said.

"She is not visible yet; I've not seen her myself," he replied, coolly. "A busy time just now, you know—dressmakers and milliners."

I thought I should have preferred a little romance myself, and that he would find it rather fatiguing to have so much to do after marriage. We sauntered about, and talked, and found ourselves on a side terrace, looking into the house.

"That's the library," he said: "I'll show it you."

We stepped through one of the windows into a cool, delicious shade. Sleep rather than Study, I thought, should be the presiding deity here, on a hot summer's day. And, even as I thought it, Mr. Fairfax, though I was not making any noise, raised his hand, and said: "Hush."

Was it an involuntary tribute to the soft repose of the atmosphere? Then I saw that his eyes, full of tender admiration, were steadily fixed on one object—a girl asleep in a chair.

But what a girl it was! What wonderful, melancholy, perfect beauty! Was she dead or alive, with that expression in her face? I

thought she must be dead—newly dead; and yet the expression of the newly dead I knew was very rarely sad.

A curious curtain behind her gave no glow to her white face. I cannot describe her; I only took in a general idea of perfect beauty and profound sadness, for it was the very saddest face my eyes had ever beheld. Her hair, cropped short, and curling on her forehead, after the fashion of the day, which gives such a youthful air to a face, only increased the utter sadness of hers. Her delicate features seemed formed to express nothing but what I should have called despair, only despair implies some amount of passion, and hers was an utter hopelessness —too hopeless to be alive.

I did not breathe freely till we were again on the terrace. "Who is she?" I cried.

"Miss Heathcote," he replied, coolly.

I was so much startled that, without remembering whom I addressed, I said, "Poor girl! *what* is the matter with her?"

"Nothing, that I am aware of," he answered, drily, and looked oddly at me. Recollecting myself, I said, meekly, "I thought she was ill."

"Well, yes, she had a fever about a year ago, and everybody knows the effects of fever remain."

He looked uncomfortable, and I was sorry for him.

"Yes, they do," I said, absently, but the idea flashed across me that she had been out of her mind, and a deep depression still remained on her. This would account both for his manner and her appearance.

"What sort of a fever was it, Mr. Fairfax?" I asked. "I am a doctor, you know, so take an interest in such things."

"It was a nervous fever," he replied, very shortly.

"Ah—just so—a nervous fever. Was she long ill?"

"Yes; she was for weeks in a low state, when no one guessed the cause. She was dangerously ill a long time, and months recovering, and I don't think she has recovered yet."

He spoke with sudden openness, almost as if it was a relief to him.

"She looked melancholy," I hazarded, hesitating for a word "When she is awake, she has quite a different expression?"

He looked askance at me, almost spoke, but checked himself. I liked the young fellow, and did not wish to vex him, so hastened to add: "I ask as a doctor again—that sort of thing is all health."

"Her spirits *are* depressed," he said, "since the fever; but I am certain our marriage will cure her. She wants change."

He looked anxiously at me, though he spoke with decision, and I cheerfully replied, "Nothing in the world more likely."

He let the subject drop, and so did I.

I felt curious for dinner time to come, as I longed to see again this melancholy bride. It was an odd way to greet the return of an absent lover, by being fast asleep. She had looked like a beautiful picture, or statue, slumbering there, and it now struck me that somewhere or other

I had seen a picture or statue like her, though it had not occurred to me where I saw her.

I learned from Mr. Fairfax that she was an only child, and that there was no one else staying in the house, except a sister of the late Lady Heathcote, an old Scotch lady.

"Lady Heathcote died when they had been married just a year, after the only child was born."

"I have an idea," I said, "that children who cost their mothers' lives always have a sadness about them."

"That won't do," he answered, shaking his head. "Miss Heathcote would not serve for an illustration of the idea. She was not in the least a melancholy child or girl, I assure you."

It was time to dress for dinner, so here we parted. I rather hurried my toilet, as I felt a good deal of curiosity about the melancholy beauty, and thought that by being in the drawing-room some time before dinner, I might secure a tête-à-tête. It did not strike me, from what I had seen or heard, that any stolen interview would be secured or desired by the lovers. I thought the engaged lady would finish her nap, dress for dinner, and then come down to the drawing-room, where all the world would be, and there shake hands with the engaged gentleman, who would take her proceedings as a matter of course, and neither expect nor wish for anything more.

I was downstairs a few minutes after seven, and we were not to dine till half-past, but my little manœuvre was not crowned by success. I had the room to myself for twenty minutes, and then Heathcote came in, apologising for having left me so long alone. "But, business you know, Dashwood, business must be attended to, whether it is civil or military."

"I have not yet had the pleasure of seeing Miss Heathcote."

"No, she won't appear till tea-time. She has one of her headaches, I am sorry to say."

"Have you noticed that she always has one of her headaches when Mr. Fairfax is expected?" said a voice with a strong Scotch accent behind me.

I quite started, as much at what seemed to me the ill-nature lying in the words, as at the unexpectedness of hearing them at all.

"Allow me to introduce Dr. Dashwood to you, Belinda," said Sir George. "Dashwood—Miss Mackenzie!"

I bowed, and she curtsied. A tall, thin, unmarried female, a little Scotch, perhaps, in the high cheek-bones and rather sandy colouring, but with traces of what must once have been uncommon beauty, still about her.

The gong sounded, and Mr. Fairfax appeared.

"He never comes before it," Miss Mackenzie remarked; "not a minute. How d'ye do, Edmond?"

He barely touched her hand, looking round the room, with the nearest approach to eagerness I had seen about him, as he did so.

"My daughter has a headache, I am sorry to say," Sir George said, in his formal way.

"You expected it, I daresay—it's the usual thing," Miss Mackenzie remarked, as she took her host's arm for the dining-room.

The dinner was not lively, though conversation never actually flagged. Heathcote and I had plenty to say to each other, but should have said it more easily without the listeners less interested than ourselves. Miss Mackenzie's remarks appeared to me always to have a little venom in them, and Mr. Fairfax was rather languid and distrait. This I thought only natural. I pitied the young man, and was beginning to regard him with very friendly feelings.

At last dinner was over, and we adjourned to the drawing-room, but still the heroine of the story did not appear. Nor did she till the servant had brought in the tea apparatus, when, as he left the apartment, she glided into it.

She was dressed in black, which made her paleness more apparent, and had no colour about her, only a white stephanotis in the front of her dress. Some transparent material covered, without hiding, her neck and arms. She was tall, and I could see, as she glided noiselessly forward, that her figure was as faultless as her face. She kept her eyes cast down, but appeared to feel who was in the room, though she did not see them; for she advanced towards her father and myself, who stood chatting in the bay window, where the tea things had been placed, and, as she did so, extended her hand to Mr. Fairfax en passant. He just took it and, I think, pressed, for he did not shake, it, and then let it drop. He looked earnestly at her. "Better," he almost whispered, and she almost whispered "Yes," in reply. And all the time she never raised her eyes for one moment, and her face never varied from the expression of profound melancholy it had worn in her sleep. All the time her likeness, and yet unlikeness, to some person or picture that I had seen was borne in upon my mind, while a disagreeable sort of spell-bound sensation, as if I were beholding a ghost, took possession of my mind, so ghost-like was her appearance, her gliding movements, her silent approach, during which she never for one moment raised her eyes.

She was close to us, and Sir George introduced us in his formal way.

"Mr. Dashwood, let me present you to my daughter."

I bowed; she curtsied, and held out her hand to her father's old friend. I took it, and it was as cold as ice; then she raised her eyes and looked at me.

Good heavens! how her eyes astonished me—light, melancholy blue I had expected; but these were of the deepest brown, and as brilliant as stars! Where—where—heavens and earth!—*where* had I seen them—had I seen *her*—before?

I almost leaped backwards, as a revelation flashed across me, and I half whispered the word "Floss!"

(To be concluded.)

THE CRUISE OF THE RESERVE SQUADRON.

By Charles W. Wood,
Author of "Through Holland," "In the Black Forest," etc.

WE returned from Tangiers just in time to hear that they were illuminating the caves with blue lights; and on the chance of being not too late, Broadley and I started up the Rock in the rear of those who had gone before. Alas! ere we could reach the caves the last light was extinguished, and profound darkness reigned once more. A few blue-jackets, who had assisted at the ceremony with candles, were still there, but with the best will in the world they only made darkness yet more visible. The caves looked huge, mysterious, and impenetrable: and now you unexpectedly stumbled down half a dozen unseen steps, and now nearly fell into unprotected abysses on the right hand and on the left. Great columns of rock and high vaulted roofs gave one the impression of being in some ancient heathen temple that might have belonged to an extinct race of giants, and no doubt under the blue lights the effect was startling and splendid. We regretted our untoward fate; but to be ten minutes too late has before now turned the current of a life, and changed the fortunes of an empire.

After the intense outside heat, too, the caves were freezingly cold, and in a few minutes we were shivering as if ague stricken. So after sundry falls and half a dozen break-neck escapes, we were glad to get back to daylight.

Not much longer would the Reserve Squadron grace the waters of Gibraltar Bay. The view from this point, half way up the rock, was, and ever must be, one of singular beauty and interest. The hill sloped gradually to the town, and nearly all it possessed of verdure and vegetation immediately surrounded us. The town, reaching to the calm bay, seemed hot and crowded. To the left, Europa Point looked towards the African coast. We fancied ourselves just able to discern its outlines, and mark the spot where stood Tangiers, late scene of our exploits and anxieties. Broadley, indeed, had recovered marvellously, and was himself again. But merely to gaze across the straits and imagine the outlines and undulations of Tangiers brought back all yesterday's experiences.

"What a shame," said Broadley, looking out over the water in a dreamy sort of way, "that you should have been so bothered, and half our short visit wasted, by the indiscretion of lemon tea! Who knows when we may find ourselves there again? Don't you think we ought to warn everybody against that tea?"

"Hardly necessary," I returned. "The decoction seemed to me

particularly nauseous. I wondered how in the world you got through so much of it. But we left one trouble behind us only to come back to another."

"What's that?" said Broadley. "You mean that after all we are not to see the waters of Vigo?"

"No," I replied. "That is disappointing, of course, but I referred more particularly to Van Stoker. If he continues to write letters and love sonnets at this rate, his brain must give way. Did you observe the cargo he sent on shore in the steam pinnace just before we landed? The pinnace was nearly swamped. He will surely have to raise a mortgage on his Irish estates to cover the expenses of postage. And do you see that the *Defence* has nearly righted herself? — that list to starboard has all but disappeared."

MOORISH BEGGARS, TANGIERS.

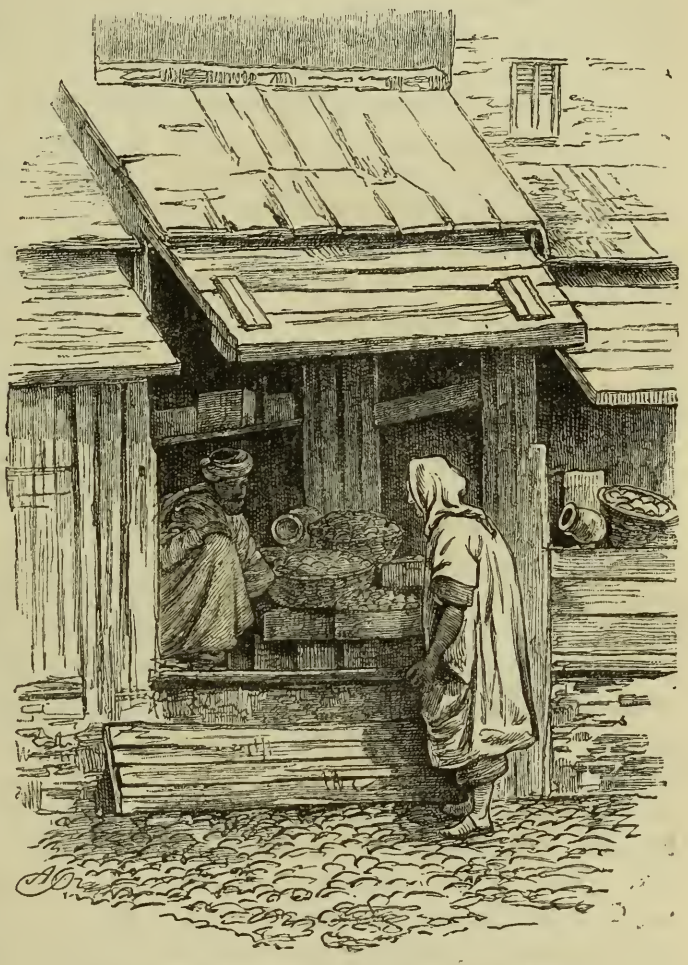
"Wonderful!" cried Broadley, unable to restrain a laugh, notwithstanding the solemnity of the subject. "He was sitting on the locker when we got back from Tangiers, gazing into vacancy, and looked wan and pale. I tried to rouse him into better spirits, but it wouldn't do; he sighed profoundly, and seemed to measure the depth of the water. The poor fellow's terribly unstrung, but the homeward voyage will do wonders for him."

"Then there's Pyramid," I continued, "who's getting almost as bad. I went down into his cabin for a few minutes' chat, and there he was, Sanskrit in one hand, pressed lily in the other, dividing his attention between the two. 'Congratulate me!' said he. 'The Admiral has given orders that instead of proceeding to Vigo we are to return to Arosa Bay. He must have heard about the lily and done this for my sake. When I think that in a few days I shall once more see *her*, have an opportunity of rescuing *her* from those barbarian gaolers, I feel

transported to Elysium realms. Tell me,' he added (calling me by my nickname on board: we all had our distinguishing titles, which more or less fitted into some individual trait or distinctive characteristic), 'do you think it would be possible to smuggle her into the *Defence*?'"

"Sheer madness!" cried Broadley to me, in consternation. "Surely you didn't hold out any encouragement?"

"I'm afraid I did," I answered, guiltily. "For the life of me I can't help sympathising with him. 'Would you give up your cabin to her?' he asked, 'and I'll give mine up to you, and get Dr. O'Thwartigan to certify that I am suffering from accelerated action of the heart, and must have an uninterrupted current of fresh air. I can have a temporary shakedown under the wind-sail in the ward-room, or take up my quarters among the charts.'"



Stall in Tangiers.—Driving a Bargain.

"And what did you say?" cried Broadley, looking like Jove ready to launch forth thunderbolts.

"Said I'd help him all I could," I answered. "But as that amounts to a mere nothing, I felt I was not committing any great indiscretion. I left him contemplating the lily; no doubt he is gazing at it now. But what a disappointment to *us*," I continued, "who have no fair captive to rescue, to miss the waters of Vigo, lose Seville, with its rich orange groves, its beautiful women, famous in song and story, its ancient buildings. We might almost have had a second edition of the Alhambra—if, indeed, that were possible."

"And what about the bull-fight?" demanded Broadley.

"A case of playing Hamlet with the part of Hamlet left out.

To us it will be no loss, since we had made up our minds never to see another. If one love in a life is enough, so is one bull-fight."

All this time we were gazing on the broad waters of the Straits. Across the bay the little town of Algeciras reposed under the shadow of the hills. On all sides mountains rose in grand, broad outlines, sleeping and hazy in the hot sunshine. On the waters below us, the fleet looked noble and stately. We could almost fancy we saw Van Stoker gazing into vacancy, hear Pyramid sighing from intense bliss. Darrille was lying down with an attack of neuralgia, a more constant friend to him even than it was to me. Darcy had landed, and was ransacking the town for art treasures and curious photographs.

The afternoon was on the wane; we were hot and tired. Instead of returning on board to dinner, we decided to take it quietly, dine at the hotel, join the "idle throng" on the Alameda, and get back in the cool and darkness of the night.

In the broiling sun we made our way down to the pleasant but as yet deserted gardens, whiled away half an hour in the well-supplied Reading-room and Library, and then found it was time to saunter towards the hotel. The table d'hôte was crowded, the heat tropical. Some of the male guests had started fans, which they used gracefully as ladies. It looked slightly ridiculous, but was probably an aid to digestion. The dinner was well-dressed, the wines were well-iced; but when it came to dessert, I remembered a scene in the hall not many days ago, when the old Jew brought out a lovely basket from the unlovely folds of his abba—and I passed the fruit. "Where ignorance is bliss 'twere folly to be wise" is more true than many sayings that have become proverbs. And, seeing others going in extensively for luscious figs black with ripeness, and sweet water grapes, and apricots and greengages, that here are more countless than the stones in the streets, I kept my own counsel and regretted my own experience.

When the sun had gone down, and the stars began to appear one by one in the darkening skies, the Alameda was crowded with people taking the air, and enjoying the strains of the band that, in the still night, went floating far away over the water. Spanish women, some graceful and captivating in mantillas, others following the fashion of their English sisters, very much less so in hats and bonnets, coquetted to and fro and threw out killing glances from their deep-fringed lids, and looked out upon the water where the vessels of the fleet had gradually become misty and intangible, like so many Flying Dutchmen, and now could be discerned only by the lights flashing from port and starboard. English and Spanish mingled and fraternised. Yet how different were the dark, southern beauties from our own fair countrywomen. The one all fire and passion, swayed by their emotions, ready to risk all for love and intrigue; the other, inwardly pure as outwardly they are fair and lovely and of good report.

It was our last night in Gibraltar, but we knew it not. As we went

down to the Ragged Staff, and put off for the *Defence*, we flattered ourselves we should have one more evening on shore. It was not to be. Instead of sailing on the Friday morning, according to our original programme, we were to weigh anchor at five o'clock on Thursday afternoon and begin the turning-point in the cruise—our homeward journey.

Thus on Thursday morning, after lunch, we went into Gibraltar for the last time. Only a few of us cared to do so. Like the end of all things: the last pages of a novel, the conclusion of a long day's journey, even the accomplishment of a hard task: enthusiasm with many began to flag, and the mild excitements of novelty and change that on first reaching the old Rock had been sufficient to raise a human interest, now grew flat, stale, and unprofitable. And yet it is not necessary to read sermons in stones to make them attractive. All phases of life have their daily record of light and shade. Those who live in view of an exquisite landscape never weary of it because it has its changes for every hour of the day, almost for every day of the year. So he who observes character ever so slightly, will in the humblest life and most ordinary occupation find some new fact or freak of fancy worthy a passing thought. Under such conditions all days and all phases and all lives have their charm.

We landed and made the most of our last afternoon. I had undertaken a commission that I thought would be difficult and which proved impossible. Pyramid wanted some more Vigo plates to add to his already abundant store, and the greater part of the afternoon was spent in fruitless endeavours to collect a few scattered specimens. The shops had been too well ransacked already; an army of human locusts had passed over them, and not a fragment had escaped.

Gibraltar is very different from Tangiers, and bazaars innumerable tempt the speculative and the daring. I do not think one was left unvisited, and we spent a small fortune in cab hire. Useless labour and cost. The bazaar owners will long remember the visit of the First Reserve Squadron, and probably prayed that this year might bring it again to its shores.

But for this year a far different and less interesting cruise was mapped out. Heligoland and Bergen, the quiet waters of Shetland, and the dull regions of Orkney formed the greater part of a monotonous and uneventful programme. And Orkney and Shetland are essentially spots not to be visited unless you have friends in the islands who will acquaint you with their bearings, and bring to light the hidden secrets and beauties of the waters.

The rocks of Shetland, indeed, might well tempt one to a long sojourn amidst them, and day by day they will only be more passionately loved. But many a wanderer to the islands returns without any idea that he has been in the neighbourhood of a rocky coast, wilder and more beautiful than anything we possess in England; where myriads of birds make their home, rise at your approach,

and darken the air with their numbers, and scream and cry with that wild clang that to many an ear is sweeter than the sweetest music.

I never hear the passing cry of a sea-gull but at once there rises up a vivid picture of days and weeks spent in those distant waters; cruises in and out of rocks and caves; nooks so gigantic, so hollow, so reverberating, that the cry of a single bird would startle you with its power and its echoes. Days when the sea was tossing and the winds blew, and our little yacht was the only craft bold enough to venture out upon the waters. Scenes indescribably wild and grand, when the waves dashed against the rocks and the spray fell back with passionate force, or the advancing swell rolled into the hollows and broke with a sound of thunder; and the wind would tear round and round the rocks, and over the water, and sweep down from the land with treacherous force; and we with difficulty, and a temerity that never came to grief and defied warnings, would steer our little boat into some small natural harbour formed by the rocks and the ages.

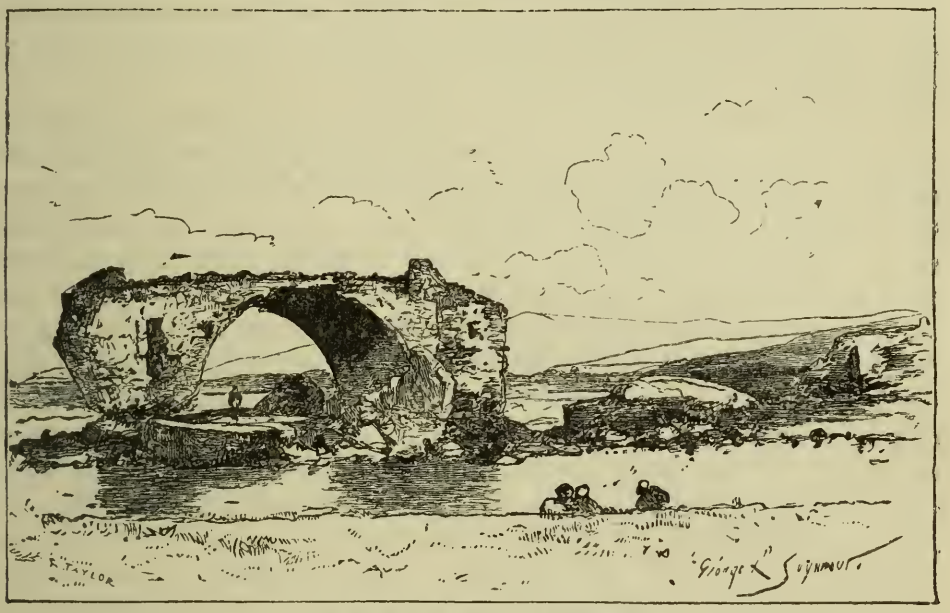
There we would land and rest, and revel in the fury of the elements and the sense of wild freedom that is the most delicious experience on earth. And the birds in countless numbers would rise and wheel around, and cry and scream, and watch us curiously as we lighted our lamp and boiled our coffee, and brought out our sandwich boxes. The smell of the salt sea, and the fresh blowing wind, the blue skies, and the bright, hot sunshine, all remain in the memory, tinged with that melancholy that all pleasures past and gone for ever carry with them.

Many a time on these wild days, when the less venturesome folk of Lerwick prophesied the return of an empty and inverted boat, we have rounded the rocks by the "Giant's leg," and turned the corner which brings the still distant harbour into view. Perhaps we have been two hours beyond our time—dinner was ordered for seven, it is now nine: but who can measure the uncertainty of wind and waves?—and in the gathering twilight, on the point beyond the Widows' Asylum, stands the figure of a woman, with her hand shading her eyes and her garments fluttering in the wild wind. And we have recognised our good and anxious landlady, Mrs. Sinclair of Leog, who, perhaps for the twentieth time, has wended her way to the point, to gaze seawards in the hope of discovering signs of the tardy wanderers. No one without experience can even faintly imagine the unspeakable pleasure of such days and scenes. Nature is here in her grandest aspect, her wildest moods, her most solemn influences. In a word, we have reached the height of all healthy and possible emotion.

But we have wandered far from Gibraltar and the Reserve Squadron, and if we do not hasten back we shall be left behind. For on that Thursday afternoon we were to depart, and bid farewell to the town, the Rock, the monkeys that we had never seen, the submarine and mysterious passage leading across to Africa that we had no wish to

see. So, our afternoon wasted in fruitless search after Vigo plates and Lisbon pottery, we returned to the *Defence*.

On the very point of departure, a signal was made for the assembling on board the Flag Ship of the Captains of the Fleet. The result was awaited with some wonder and speculation. Only too soon we learnt that the cruise of the Reserve Squadron for 1882 was virtually over. Orders had arrived from England for our immediate return. Affairs in the East looked unsettled and alarming; England was left without ships of war; we were to proceed at once to her shores. Vigo had already been abandoned, and we should not again see Arosa Bay. All this was matter for regret. I had had a longing once more to enter the wild and lovely wilderness where that "rosebud garden of girls" had showered hospitality upon us; had longed once more to



OLD ROMAN ARCH, TANGIERS.

revel in those rich geranium blooms, those shady avenues, the exquisite view of the blue waters of the bay, and the undulating hills surrounding the harbour. There would be no fresh lily for Pyramid, no rescue for the Fair Maid, who must now ceaselessly rattle her captive chains in transports of agony and despair. Nothing but the direct voyage home awaited us: the coast line of Spain and Portugal, the capricious waters of the Bay of Biscay, the English Channel—and Finis.

Instinctively I looked for Pyramid. He had disappeared. Had gone down to the M. B., borrowed "Hervey's Meditations among the Tombs," and a volume of "Tracts on the Misdirection of the Affections," with which he retired to the solitude of his cabin. But an opposite effect was produced in Van Stoker. His spirits began to rise from the first, his complexion returned, all signs of approaching decline dissolved and disappeared. Instead of writing love sonnets, he took to playing the flute, and whilst congratulating him on his

improved appearance, we condoled with one another on his diversified occupation. All day long he rang the changes of, "In my Cottage near a Wood," and "Orinthia; or, the Pilgrim of Love," until we felt that the Dead March in Saul, or the chromatic scale, would have been a welcome and enlivening variation.

Soon after five o'clock, then, on the Thursday afternoon, the ships weighed anchor, and in solemn state steamed away from Gibraltar. Leaving the quiet waters of the bay, they passed out into the broader channel of the straits. The rock, the town, Algeciras on one hand, and the coast of Africa on the other, all would soon be to us a scene of the past. They took up their positions in two lines of four and three, and began the return journey. For many days we should not touch land. All change and adventure was over. Sail drill and manœuvres would alone break the monotony of the days; and for our evenings we might return to our books, Sanskrit, whist, our improving conversations, and our "Small and Early" parties.

At the latter the M. B. as a rule took the chair, for they were generally held in his cabin, and serious topics were the special delight of his life. Tea and coffee were occasionally handed round as restoratives, but the most popular beverage was what the French call eau sucrée, flavoured with a few drops of orange-flower water. Everything of a stronger nature was strictly banished from the meetings. In some of the other vessels of the Fleet, the favourite refreshment patronised was a horrible distillation known as Plymouth Gin; but the small quantity on board the *Defence* was in the safe keeping of the worthy Dr. O'Thwartigan, who served it out in cases of emergency as he would any other of his nauseous pills and drugs. Before the end of the cruise we had most of us decided to join that excellent institution, the Blue Ribbon Army.

Pyramid even went further; we all agreed that his splendid figure gave him the opportunity of doing good that he was at present culpably wasting. It would go far towards winning converts for the Salvation Army, especially in securing recruits for the "Hallelujah Maidens." He promised to take the matter into consideration. Thus we might be said to have amongst us on board all the elements of a Revival. But it is grievous to add that Pyramid, our strongest hope and most influential member, from a personal point of view, completely fell away from his enviable state of mind before the end of the cruise. We had a foe in the camp; a Canaanite in the land; for at the very last "Small and Early" on board, he made us vibrate with horror, by declaring that the Salvation Army was all humbug, and before joining the Blue Ribbons he would see them at Halifax.

Quietly and uneventfully the days passed after leaving Gibraltar. But the Bay of Biscay, calm and civil to us when outward bound, determined, in returning, to prove her powers of caprice. One day, especially, the sea from early morning transformed itself into great moving hills and valleys of water. The ships tossed and tumbled

about in a manner alarming to weak nerves. It was impossible to walk the decks, or to keep even the semblance of a well-balanced mind and body. Now the other vessels disappeared as we sank into a watery vale that threatened to engulph us; and now we rose to the occasion on the top of a mountain, whence we could see our companions tossing about like floats, powerless as pigmies in the hands of a giant, yet holding on their way, guided and kept in check by their small helm.

It was a grand sight and a grand day; the only day during the whole cruise on which we saw a really heavy sea. And even on this occasion, the liquid hills and valleys went rolling along majestically, rising and falling, increasing and diminishing, but never breaking. Never breaking except when a roller hit the good old *Defence* a sharp broadside, that made her shiver as she ploughed through the angry trough. Then a shower of spray would break over her, and drench all those who stood in the way of this copious shower bath, and swamp the decks from which the water poured away through the scuppers, back whence they had come.

So it went on, hour after hour. The skies were dark and lowering; throughout the afternoon we had a semi-darkness, the water looked now a dismal green, and now a cold, inky black. One shuddered at the very thought of the thousands who had gone down into its cruel depths. The wind roared and whistled through the rigging; the timbers strained and cracked in vain protest against the fury of the elements. Worst of all, the temperature was cold, damp and shivery. From the moment of leaving Arosa Bay, outward bound, we had revelled in a tropical climate. If the weather had been intensely hot, the lightness of the air had made it not only bearable, but delicious. Letter after letter from England recorded a cold summer and wet days and grey skies, with no warmth or beauty in them. And we had made the most of our happier lot whilst sympathising with a state of things that in England seemed to have become chronic, since year after year brought much the same experience.

To-day, in the Bay of Biscay, we had returned to a northern, unwelcome climate. How we regretted the warm days of Arosa Bay and Gibraltar, Granada, and Tangiers, and longed to return to that climate that now by comparison seemed a very paradise, cannot be told. To attempt to sit down to meals might be described as Love's Labour Lost. Now a watery vale sent us all rolling one way into each others' arms, a confusion of tongues, chairs, unseated members, groans and laughter; and now, rising to the summit of a billowy Mont Blanc, everything and everyone went sprawling in an opposite direction.

At tiffin it was bad enough, but at dinner it was worse, and after sundry attempts one or two of us gave up the experiment and retired to the sofas. Notably Pyramid, who having received the contents of a plate of scalding soup over him, excused himself with wh

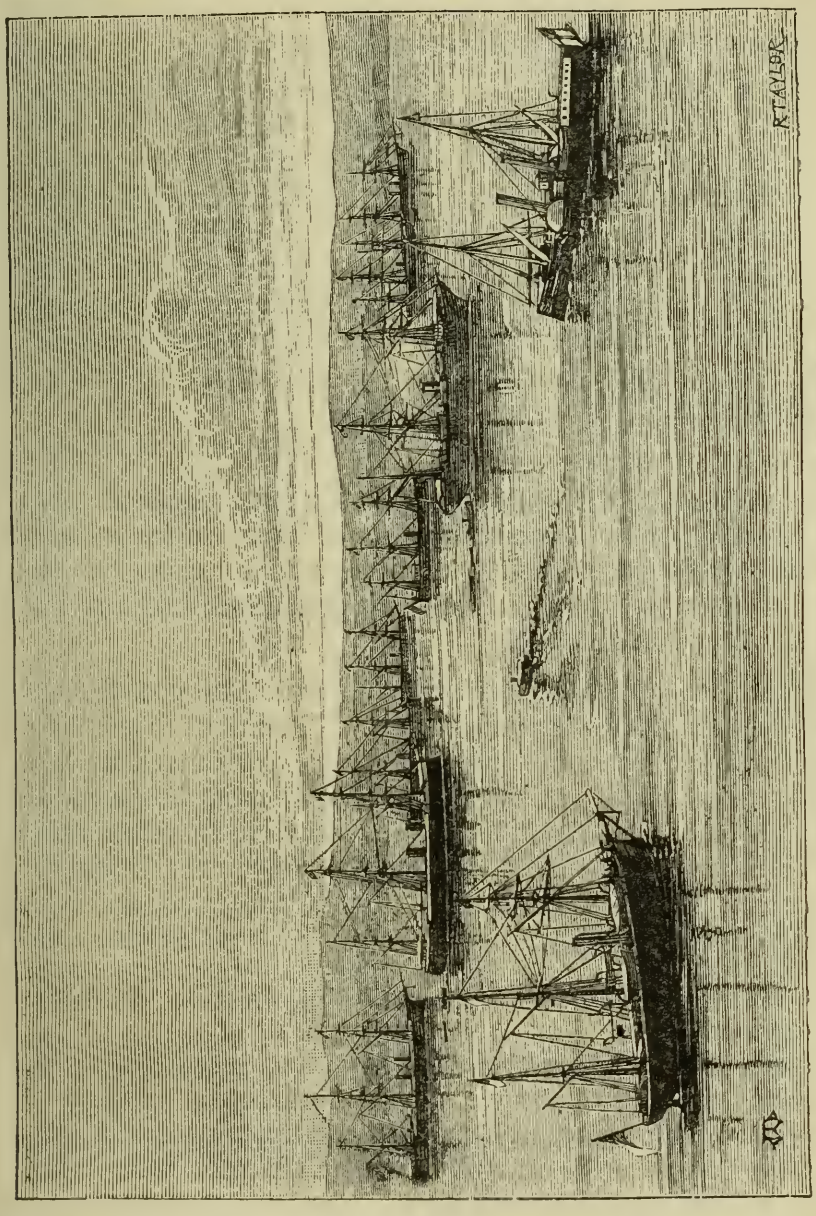
sounded very like an inverted benediction, and took up a recumbent position. I quickly followed so good an example, and from our grateful couches we watched the manœuvres of those still at table, the miracles hungry human nature can accomplish, the difficulties determination will overcome.

There was no whist that evening, no improving conversation, no "Small and Early." Even Darcy, in vain attempt to take his usual interest in his art treasures and black paper silhouettes—as improving to the mind in their peculiar way as the M. B.'s little lectures—put them up and went to bed. The M. B. himself was dull and dispirited, and appealed to his senior on board, the worthy Dr. O'Thwartigan, as to whether, under the circumstances, his usual evening dose of eau sucrée might be flavoured with a few drops of Plymouth gin in place of the usual orange-flower water. But the worthy doctor, not seeing sufficient reason for a breach of the ordinary rules (he was as anxious as we were for the M. B.'s welfare and happiness, and they were excessively attached to each other), negatived the suggestion. Whereupon the amiable M. B. retired in wretched spirits to his cabin and spent the remainder of the evening among the tombs with his favourite Hervey. (Pyramid had returned him the book by this time, much consoled by its cheerful and comfortable pages, and inspired with an exhilarating conviction of the mutability of all earthly things.)

Greatest miracle of all, Wakeham this evening was silent. De Keyser had taken a dose of anti-fat, and abandoned his evening walk on deck of four miles, measured by a pedometer, and had retired to his own cabin in company with Pyramid, for a game of "Beggar my Neighbour." They were both partial to this very innocent distraction; never played for money if they could help it; and "Beggar my Neighbour" was just sufficiently exciting to make the time pass pleasantly. I once thoughtlessly proposed a game at loo, and shall never forget the combined horror of the countenances around me. A proposal to blow up the Fleet would hardly have created as much sensation. Not only was it against the rules of the Service, but it was a device of the Evil One for the ruin of soul and body. They first thought of reporting my suggestion to the Captain, but finally contented themselves with composing a special prayer for me against the World, the Flesh and the Devil, to be publicly used in next Sunday's service. I am glad to say that I was soon brought to a better frame of mind, and restored to their full favour and confidence.

Time passed; we entered the waters of the English Channel, and felt very near home. Having started from Portland, so in like manner we were to return to it. Again that subtle change crept over everyone that marks the end of all things. During the cruise our interests had all been in common; now each looked at life from a separate point of view. There would shortly be a sort of general break up

in the camp. Broadley was leaving on promotion. Wakeham had applied to be sent out to Egypt, and received an affirmative answer. Van Stoker, who had joined merely for the Cruise, was naturally burning to be away. He had packed up his flute and turned generally restless and unsettled. He felt like Othello, his occupation gone.



THE RESERVE SQUADRON AT GIBRALTAR.

It was useless to write love letters, since he would himself precede them. The expense of postage, moreover, had been ruinous, and he confided to me that in the unsatisfactory state of Ireland, he doubted whether a mortgage upon his estates would realise sufficient to cover his postal liabilities. Under the present management, every possible facility had been given for a general division of Irish property to everyone who could prove that he had no possible claim thereon. This

being the state of affairs, who in their senses would accept a mortgage? We all declined it on the spot, even under the most favourable conditions. Wayle alone—another supernumerary lieutenant, who, during the cruise, had developed a general talent for argumentativeness—said he would have taken the mortgage if he could, but he couldn't. So, on reaching Portland, Van Stoker wrote to his solicitors, and received in due course the following answer:

"DEAR SIR,—We have done our utmost to raise a mortgage upon your Irish Estates, but without success. Half a dozen of our best and most venturesome clients quite refuse to accept them even at a gift. Others remark that, in course of time, Irish property will be cut up into portions, and divided amongst the people as a reward for general good conduct, love of peace, and a singular regard for the laws of meum and tuum. Under these circumstances, we recommend you to endeavour to *sell* the property. We might possibly obtain a price which would enable you to cover the legal expenses of our claim in this transaction. Yours truly,

"HOWARD AND DEVONSHIRE."

This would never do. So Van Stoker proceeded to memorialise the Home Office for a remittance of the immense sums he had spent in postage. Everyone said he must be mad to expect a favourable reply. But the result proved that his confidence had not been misplaced. It ran as follows:

"DEAR SIR,—We shall be happy to return to you the enormous amounts spent in franking your letters. (Permit us to ask, by the way, not from vulgar curiosity, but as a guide for ourselves, how many hundred secretaries you employ.) We cannot, however, afford to send you so large a sum in specie, and have therefore arranged to hand you over 10,000 acres of Irish property in the County of Donoughmore. A mutual benefit will thus be conferred, and we remain, dear Sir, yours gratefully, "WHITEHALL & Co."

Van Stoker took time to consider, and the matter dropped.

To go back.

In state and dignity the Reserve Squadron proceeded up Channel. With what mixed feelings we passed again each well-known point and object. How much had we seen and experienced since, outward bound, we had gazed upon those ruddy cliffs and bold rocks, those verdant slopes and undulating hills. The very sunshine had seemed gilded with the pleasures of imagination. Now our ardour was damped by the ending of a cruise that had been singularly pleasant, the dispersion of companions distinguished by a harmony of tastes and pastimes, profitable studies, and a love for discussions on profound and serious topics. The give-and-take principle of life, secret of all good fellowship, had never been absent. Very soon, how widely dispersed would our various lines become.

Dr. O'Thwartigan longed for that repose which domestic felicity could alone impart. His junior, the amiable M. B., panted for the hour when he should rejoin his debating society, and give forth to the world the pamphlet that should revolutionise modern thought, and bring lasting confusion to all followers of Darwin. Wakeham was wild with excitement at the prospect of going out to Egypt, where undoubtedly he would distinguish himself, and add to his already numerous decorations. It is unnecessary to describe Van Stoker's emotions, or his immediate destination. So we all had our various lines to traverse, except those who, like Darrille and Darcy, Pyramid and the Commander, must still, for many a long month to come, stand by the good old *Defence*.

So passed the final hours. One morning, in the grey, cold dawn, I was awakened out of a sound sleep by a message to the effect that "Captain Broadley, sir, would be glad if you could join him on the bridge."

Up I went, in the chilling atmosphere. It was neither night nor day, though light was momentarily increasing. In solemn silence, the vessels of the Reserve Squadron were passing within the breakwater of Portland. Before us was the well-known little island, singularly enough bearing in outline some faint, diminutive resemblance to Gibraltar. We had left the rock in the warmth and glow and brightness of sunshine—how grateful by comparison. Portland looked gloomy and cheerless, cold and inhospitable; reflecting, as it were, the sorrows of its destiny. Weymouth, to the right, still slept. It would wake up to find once more the vessels of the fleet exactly where they were some weeks ago, and to wonder whether the interval had been a dream, the vacant waters imagination. One by one the vessels passed round the breakwater, and took up their positions. Then, at a given signal from the Flag Ship, down went the anchors with a simultaneous splash and rattle. The cruise was over.

Yet not quite over. We had returned to England, it is true, but our time was not up, and it was soon found that the vessels were not yet to disperse. As usual, contradictory rumours were afloat. Now it was said that we were merely to cruise about the channel; and now that we were to go over to Cherbourg to pay our French neighbours a visit. Time would show; and time very quickly showed that we were not again to leave English waters, or to lose sight of the English coast.

The succeeding days were not the least delightful of the whole cruise. The hours passed in that delicious idleness that is the height of luxury to those whose ordinary life is one of hard work. In the morning, sometimes we would go a-fishing, and invariably return with empty baskets. It was evident that there were no fish in the sea; or they had all been caught; or they had gone cruising to other shores. In the afternoon we would land and stroll about Portland, or the quiet, very uneventful streets of Weymouth, and lounge away an hour

at the club, and always get back in time for dinner—that most important event of daily life. Here, too, off Portland, we had the long deferred regatta. The day was perfect and the afternoon passed in the excitement of competition. The men of the *Defence* carried off the First Prize, and one or two of the funnier races provoked roars of laughter.

One afternoon we went from Weymouth to see the famous Swannery at Lord Ilchester's. Nowhere else in England exists the singular sight of many hundred birds flying across the water at the whistle of the keeper, flapping their wings and clamouring to be fed. It is one of the prettiest drives out of Weymouth; the village is interesting, and the inn was everything that was pleasant and comfortable. A neat-handed Phyllis, with more than her share of good looks, waited on us: whilst a modest bride and bridegroom, who had not expected an invasion, went and hid their blushes and their happiness in the lanes, wandering about the earth that for them was just now evidently a paradise. From an old piano in the corner, we did our best to draw forth strains of triumph in honour of the happy pair, but they would not be charmed into return. No melody or harmony could equal that existing in their own hearts. We passed out of their existence and presently returned to the *Defence.*

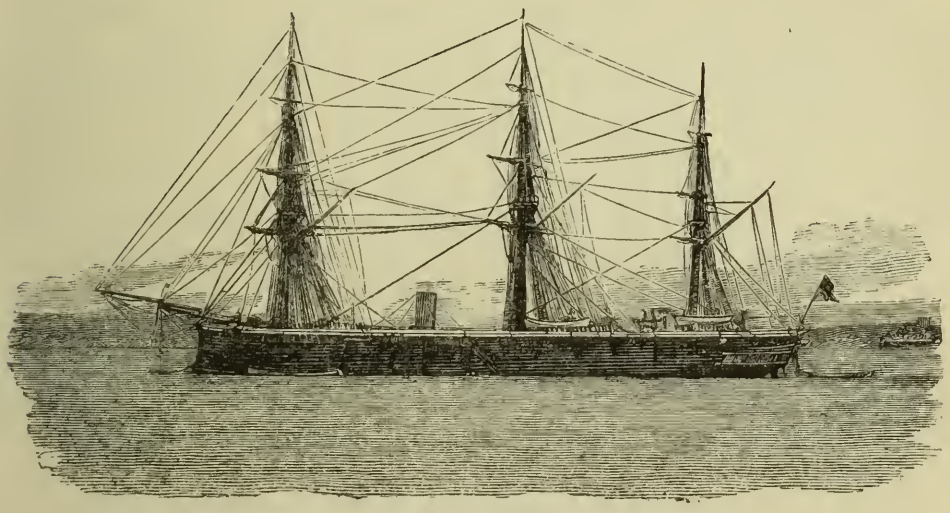
We steamed down channel and put into Torbay one Saturday night. The unexpected advent of seven ships of war surprised the good people; perhaps alarmed them, until they found out that our intentions were friendly, and our motives honourable. Never during the whole cruise had the vessels looked to greater advantage than when at anchor in these waters, framed as they were in an exquisite setting of fertile, undulating hills. There are few lovelier spots in England. We landed on Sunday morning, but the sea was so rough, the wind so boisterous, that we had hard work to reach the steps. There we battled with wind and water and stone, which did their best to swamp us, but failed. A few hours on shore passed only too quickly, in finding out old friends and wandering about the beautiful "irregularities" of Torquay; and then we found that getting back to the fleet was a yet harder task than we had had in the morning. At five o'clock in the evening we started again for Portland.

The fleet left Portland for Portsmouth. Here we went round the Isle of Wight, one of the prettiest and pleasantest sights of the whole cruise. The green spots of the island, the graceful undulations, so beautifully wooded, the well-placed houses, form, as it were, a succession of park-like scenes. We felt very much as if gazing upon enchanted ground. Opposite Osborne, where Her Majesty was then in residence, we fired a Royal salute. The ships anchored off Portsmouth, and, soon after, the Admiral finally resigned Command of the Squadron. Passing between the lines, His Royal Highness made for Osborne.

The Cruise of the Reserve Squadron was now virtually over. It remained only for each vessel to return to its station. Here Van

Stoker left us, and the wardroom went into mourning. Wayle also departed. Broadley, alas, had left us days and days ago, within a few hours of first reaching Portland; and the old *Defence* looked so strange without him, and the wardroom so empty, that I would fain have departed also. But Captain Jago (now Admiral Jago, for he has since obtained Flag Rank,) declared he would treat me as a deserter if I left the ship; and it required neither humorous threat nor great persuasion to induce me to accept the invitation, and take up my quarters with the kindest and most hospitable of men; who, out of the abundance of an overflowing heart, made the weeks that followed, weeks never to be forgotten; charged with a grateful recollection neither time nor change could efface.

Our numbers were diminishing. The *Defence* proceeded on to Plymouth, where Wakeham left for Egypt, viâ London. We were



H.M.S. *Defence.*

fortunate enough to come in for the Plymouth regatta, and one of the prettiest sights imaginable was to see the graceful yachts with their white sails, flying out seawards from one end of the breakwater, and coming in at the other. Here, alas, another of our diminishing numbers departed: one who had contributed much to the life and soul of the cruise; had been full of fun and wit; always ready for anything that was going on, often the first to propose some active scheme of enjoyment. Mr. Edward Jago left us, amidst lamentations and mourning and woe.

It now remained for us to make our way round to Rock Ferry. The weather was simply celestial. The lovely Devonshire coast never looked more tempting. I know not whether day or night was the more exquisite enjoyment. Not a breath of wind ruffled the surface of the water. All through, it was a sea of glass; a painted ocean. We rounded the Land's End and passed the grand rocks of Tintagel and Boscastle, and all that lovely and romantic coast. By day we had

broad sunshine and blue skies, and by night, the time of full moon had once more come round.

It was impossible not to draw a comparison between this hour, pleasant as it was, and that other hour when the moon, in full orbed brightness, had lighted up that magic scene in Granada—the halls and courts of the Alhambra. How vividly it came back to us. How, not only the whole marvellous panorama, but every minute detail, seemed stamped for ever upon the memory. How we longed to put back the dial of our lives and find ourselves once more in the midst of those days and experiences that could never return; even though fate or fortune might very possibly at some future time lead us over the same ground. The first press of the grape is the sweetest. Things never do repeat themselves; there is always a difference; and imagination magnifies that difference into a mighty change.

Onward up St. George's Channel. Every hour was bringing us nearer the final end. The last morning dawned, and outside Liverpool the *Defence* halted to discharge her quarter's ammunition. It was a second edition of our work outside Arosa Bay. Pyramid alone shrank from the ordeal. It opened up old wounds, and called to remembrance a fair captive, languishing in hopeless expectation of his return. I found the lily between his Sanskrit, and on the margin of the page he had written the pathetic verses beginning "The heart bowed down." Darcy had more than once asked him for the lily, to add to his matchless collection of photographs and black paper silhouettes, gathered from all parts of the world, and combining many of the beauties of nature and of art. But Pyramid could never be brought to part with it. He confided to me that when they had settled down again, he intended to have the lily cremated, and wear the ashes in a locket.

Round after round of ammunition went thundering out to sea. We all grew black and smoke dried, and thought what a blessing it was this firing occurred only four times a year. Then the torpedo had to be launched, and we had lost our gunnery lieutenant, and his successor had not yet joined, and what was to be done? Darrille came to the rescue. He had read up for the occasion, and the torpedo went off with signal success. The target disappeared into the depths of the sea or the heights of the clouds: and the firing was over.

Up the Mersey: the banks on each side narrowing and showing more and more life and activity as we neared that great centre of wealth and industry. Reaching Liverpool we found ourselves in a forest of masts, a world of energy and enterprise, a hive of human bees; everything that was great and prosperous, but prosy and commonplace. So great a contrast to our late life was too violent and unromantic to bear contemplation. What consolation is there in telling us that we cannot have our cake and eat it too? Very few of us are philosophers, and none of us are always philosophic. Yet must we make up our minds to adopt the motto of the Eastern King:

"This also shall pass away." To-day we visit the tombs of our friends, and to-morrow other friends visit ours. So when, at 1.40, on that Monday afternoon, the *Defence* reached her moorings at Rock Ferry, and the anchors went down with a last run and rattle, the sound fell upon the ear with something of the knell of departed hope.

Yet there had not yet been one drawback to record, one regret to register. Our days had been gilded with sunshine. Perhaps we should only realise the delight and pleasure of the cruise, when the flight of time proved how much memory had laid up in store for the future. A recollection of scenes, events, adventures, infinitely pleasant companionship, that in the passing away left behind them no sorrow and no sadness save the inevitable penalty of retrospection.

BY EDEN'S SWIFT TIDE.

ALL silent and changed is the spot where we parted,
In days that have vanished, by Eden's swift tide;
Ah, dear were those days, love, when gay and light-hearted,
We deemed that the sunshine would always abide.

'Twas then the green gloom, where the branches hung over,
Was lit by the smile of your gladsome young face.
No warble of bird, and no whisper of lover,
Now breaks the sad silence that broods o'er the place!

Our youth has departed, its roses have faded—
On graves of the past have their petals been shed;
By sorrow and absence our lives are o'ershaded,
But ne'er from our skies has hope's rainbow quite fled.

In years yet to come, though my name be unspoken,
I know the old love, dear, will live in your heart—
As it liveth in mine—for our faith is unbroken,
Despite the hard mandate which doomed us to part.

Ah, dear is the spot where our troth was once plighted,
And dear the green bowers by Eden's swift tide;
But dearer the hope that, at last re-united,
Our hearts may know bliss, which for aye shall abide!

HELEN MARION BURNSIDE.

MY SATURDAYS.

CHERRY ROPER'S PENANCE.

I.

ONE cold Saturday in January, Charity Roper broke in upon me. I did not lock my door against her, even mentally; but there was something about the girl which always made me use *sudden* words in speaking of her. She was not noisy, or bustling; but she always seemed to take you by surprise, never doing or saying what you would expect, and always appearing where you did not look for her.

"Why, Cherry, my dear," I exclaimed: "I thought you were in London."

"So I was, yesterday," she returned; "but that doesn't hinder my being here to-day, does it? Do you usually take more than twenty-four hours on the journey?"

"No, you absurd child; but I thought you were to stay a month with your cousins."

"They thought so, I daresay, and I let them think; it was no business of mine what they thought. But I was bored there; so yesterday afternoon, when they were all gone to a lecture, or something stupid, I just packed up my traps, and came away."

"Without letting them know, or saying good-bye?"

"Why not? It saved a lot of trouble. I hate good-byes, and they would have bothered me to know why I wouldn't stay."

"They will never ask you there again."

"Oh yes, they will. They want me to make their parties go off. Besides, they know my way. I wrote them a sweet little note last night when I got home, and told them a lot of stories. Par exemple, I told them that I had fancied from the mother's letters lately that she was not very bright, and that when I began thinking about her yesterday afternoon, I couldn't stand it any longer, and had to see for myself how she was. So you see, instead of thinking me a wretch, they are now admiring my filial devotion. Rather good, isn't it?"

"It is rather good that you have come home, I think, though it need not have been quite so abruptly; for I have not been quite happy about your mother myself."

"Why! She hasn't had one of her upsets, and kept it from me, has she?" asked Cherry, quickly. "It struck me she was looking white."

"Oh, no; it is only that this damp weather has not seemed to agree with her, and I thought she was just in the state in which a

little overdoing, or a chill, would bring one on. Now you are at home she will be all right."

"I'll see to her. I'll keep her in cotton, until the clouds dry up, and the river goes down. But I rather think it will be gun-cotton; for the fact is, Mrs. Singleton, that of all the quarrels mamma and I were ever engaged upon, the present is the finest specimen."

Cherry threw off her fur cape, and settled her muddy boots on the fender-stool, with an air of enjoying the situation.

"I am sorry to hear it," I said. "But I don't think it is any business of mine."

"No business of yours, perhaps," returned Cherry. "But I have come out to-day in the wind on purpose to tell you, and you must listen to me. I want support and sympathy in this matter."

I resigned myself to listen.

"It's about Mr. Goldthorpe," resumed Cherry. "Do you know him?"

"Is it any relation of the old gentleman who was staying with the Mintons in the autumn?"

"That gentleman's father was my Mr. Goldthorpe's mother's husband, and I have always understood that she was only married once, and had but one son."

"*Your* Mr. Goldthorpe, Cherry?"

"I'm coming to that. In the first place, I wish to observe that he is not *old*, but only *elderly;* to be exact, he was fifty-seven last birthday."

"He looks more," I remarked.

"What do looks matter?" she demanded, scornfully. "Well, I met him two or three times when he was with the Mintons, as you say, and he seemed to take a fancy to your humble servant; but I never thought of its coming to anything. Then he turned up again when I was in London this time, and was always coming to Portman Square. He sent me bouquets, and tickets for the opera, and one evening he all but declared himself, but I escaped, and the next day he sent me a bracelet. I thought then it was time to run away, and here I am. Now you have the true inner history of my Hegira."

"And a very tangled history it is, now I have got it. I don't understand what you mean to do, or what you have been doing, or why you have done it. I wonder if you know yourself?"

"I do know, quite well. I mean to marry Mr. Goldthorpe. I did not let him propose to me at once, because I hadn't quite made up my mind; and then I didn't like the affair going on in somebody else's house, and the mater knowing nothing about it. So I came back to her, thinking she would be as pleased as Punch; and a nice return I got for my dutifulness!"

"What did she say?"

"Asked me if I loved him! And when I couldn't produce feelings exactly up to boiling point, cooled down what feelings I had

with floods of sentiment. This morning we had another talk, of a less affecting nature; and she told me right out that I was going to sell myself, and that she would never give her consent. In fact, if I had wanted to marry an ensign living on his pay—instead of a financier with 10,000*l.* a-year, she couldn't have been more cruelly, sternly unrelenting."

"Probably she would have been less so."

"I daresay. It's rather queer to have all the sentimentality on the mother's side, and all the common-sense on the daughter's; but such is the progress of the age we live in. Now, you see, we are at the dead lock."

"I see. But, Cherry, why are you so bent on this marriage? You are young and pretty—you know it as well as I do; much happier chances may come to you."

"They may, and also they mayn't. This one has, and it may never come again. Besides, I wouldn't make a romantic marriage for anything; it's sure to be unlucky, by way of carrying out its character."

"But need you make such a very unromantic one as this? I won't say anything about love; but is Mr. Goldthorpe a man whom you can heartily like and respect?"

"I like him—as well as most women like their husbands. I feel that I soon could get used to him, which is a fair average of matrimonial felicity. And Mr. Goldthorpe is an honourable man, respected by all who know him. I shall be respected as his wife."

"And that satisfies you?"

"One can't have everything. Look here, Mrs. Singleton. I am just sick of being poor, *sick* of it. I hate having to save and scrape, and travel third class, and dye my old dresses. I hate seeing mamma pale and drooping, when a month at the seaside would put her to rights. Poverty is miserable, and wretched, and degrading; I've had to stand it all my life, but now I have a chance of escape, I should be simply a fool if I let it slip."

Cherry spoke in desperate earnest, staring into the fire, while the angry spots burnt larger and larger in her cheeks. After a pause, I said:

"I had hoped something quite different for you. I thought last summer that you and Hugh Carfield understood each other."

"Dr. Carfield has no right and no reason to complain of anything that I may do," Cherry replied stiffly. "There was never the shadow of an engagement between us."

"No, but I am sure that he thought he had more than the shadow of a hope."

"That was his folly, then. But I didn't come here to talk about Dr. Carfield. I came because the Indian box from Mrs. M'Clure arrived this morning. She has sent a lot of lovely things for the Mission Bazaar, mixed up with presents for us, and things for her

children; and we've been unpacking them half the day. And mamma wants you to come in to tea on Monday, and look at them; for she will have to pack up all the bazaar things on Tuesday, and send them in to London."

"Very well; tell her, with my love, that I should like to come very much, and I will be in about four."

"That's right: you'll oblige me also by so doing. I got a note from Mr. Goldthorpe by the afternoon post (prompt, wasn't it?) asking my leave to come down and call on Monday afternoon. Of course there is no doubt what that means. Now you'll keep mamma quiet, and so I can give him his opportunity nicely, and get things settled. I am sure you will always be on the side of distressed lovers," she concluded, with a whimsical glance at me.

"I don't see any lovers in this case," I said, gravely, "nor any distress; and I don't feel called upon to co-operate. You must excuse me to your mother, Cherry; I shall not go: it will be much better for her to see Mr. Goldthorpe, and for you all to settle your affairs in my absence."

"Ah, but I shan't excuse you," cried Cherry, jumping up from her chair, and making a pirouette on one toe. "You aren't engaged, and you aren't unwell, and you said you would come, and you must. I'll take no other message than the one you gave me. Good-bye, until Monday."

And the door was shut behind her, before I could repeat my refusal.

I don't think I have much to add to what she said about herself in order to make the situation clear. Her mother was a widow, with a small income, of which she seldom spoke, and never complained. Mrs. Roper had lived her life, and accepted the limitations of her fate; poverty and self-denial were entirely tolerable to her, but the slightest deviation from her fastidious standard of honourableness was not. And it was to such a mother that this wilful girl declared her intention of perjuring herself at the altar, and swearing to love, honour, and obey a man to whom she meant to do neither, in consideration of the luxuries that money can buy! I knew how deeply wounded she must be, in every fibre of her proud and sensitive spirit, and I grieved for her.

Then, too, I was hurt about this business of Hugh Carfield. He was Dr. Bramston's partner, and a quiet young man, but very clever in his profession, and nice in every way. Dr. Bramston had for many years enjoyed a vested right in killing and curing the inhabitants of Tamston, disputed only by a stray homœopath, whom nobody patronised, except the dissenters. However, Dr. Bramston's cob had for some time seemed to be going slower and slower, and there were those among us who had misgivings as to whether his master were not falling equally behind the times. So we were not sorry when he anticipated competition by bringing down a youthful partner,

fresh from Paris and Berlin, with the latest medical science at his fingers' ends. I was particularly pleased, for Hugh Carfield came with a special introduction to me from his mother, who was one of my oldest and dearest friends, though we had not met for years. I was anxious to know and like her son, but he was rather shy, and much absorbed in his work; and it was only during the illnesses of little Tim and Lena Graham * that I really came to know him. Since then we had become intimate. When I have said that he only needed experience to make him a perfect doctor, I have said all that is possible; for it has always seemed to me that the union of tenderness, firmness, patience, and skill, which forms the ideal (often realised) of his profession, represents all but the highest type of human nature

But my favourite had given his whole heart's love to Cherry Roper, and she had smiled on him for a summer, and now was ready to throw him over for a stock-broker old enough to be her father! I was angry and disgusted with the girl, though I could never resist her witcheries when she was present. I would not go, and be made her tool, and engage her mother's attentions, while she hooked her elderly lover—not I!

Nevertheless, when Monday came, I went.

II.

It was about a quarter of an hour's walk from my house to Mrs. Roper's, which stood near the river, a little way outside Tamston. The nearest way from the high road was a path leading to a foot-bridge over a stream, which ran past the lawn. The stream was now flooded, and I found the water just up to the level of the bridge, and could barely cross without wetting my feet. The river had risen over the intervening meadows, and lines of hedges alone enabled one to recognise localities, like meridians over the oceans in a map. The house stood on a little piece of rising ground, and the garden sloped down from it; the lower half was now covered with muddy water.

The creepers on the house were bare brown stems, the flower-beds were empty; and I thought to myself that Mr. Goldthorpe's first impressions would certainly not be cheering.

The second impressions would be reassuring, though, if he felt, as I did, the pleasantness of the tiny drawing-room into which I stepped, almost from the hall-door. Carpets, curtains, and chair-covers might be shabby; but the greenhouse door was filled up with a blaze of primulas, cyclamen and crocuses, the fruit of Mrs. Roper's clever and untiring gardening; a bright fire sparkled upon the array of fanciful Indian ornaments and drapery displayed on a side-table, and various pretty foreign "objects," and a few good water-colour sketches, decorated the walls as permanent inhabitants. Mrs. Roper herself, unmistakeably a lady, in her quiet black dress and soft white cap and

* See "How She Atoned," Argosy, March, 1883.

shawl, presented no alarming spectacle to a man in search of a mother-in-law. I thought Cherry looked less pretty than usual, rather too smartly dressed, and rattling a lot of bangles whenever she moved, which was every minute, as she seemed unable to sit still.

I duly inspected the Indian articles, poor Mrs. Roper displaying them in peaceful unconsciousness of any fresh disturbance impending; but I own that I could only give them half my attention, while I listened for a step outside. Presently, there came a heavy crunch on the gravel, and a loud knock which seemed almost in the room. There was a startled pause among us three ladies; Cherry turned scarlet; her mother glanced at her, and understood it all. The flush was reflected more faintly on her delicate cheeks, and she seated herself to await the event. We heard the little maid-servant open the door, and a rather loud man's voice enquire for Miss Roper; then followed a shuffling and stumping with overcoat and umbrella; the little maid announced some name hitherto unknown to history, and retired behind the door to let the visitor enter.

I really cannot describe Mr. Goldthorpe, because there is nothing to describe about him. Walk down Old Broad Street early in any week-day afternoon, and you will be sure to meet half-a-dozen prosperous elderly gentlemen, any one of whom will do to represent Cherry Roper's latest lover. He had "City" stamped on every line of his face and every fold of his clothing; and I felt sure that Mrs. Roper (whose connections were all with the Church and the Army) was inwardly turning up the nose of gentility. With this phase of her feelings I did not so deeply sympathise.

"How do you do, Mr. Goldthorpe?" she said, rising to greet him. "I did not expect to see you in Tamston at this time of year; visitors are apt to be frightened by our floods."

"Didn't you, ma'am? Ah!—I—I thought you might have."

Mrs. Roper glanced at Cherry again, but the girl sat mute and uncomfortable.

"No; I did not know that you were likely to be in the neighbourhood; but you must not put an inhospitable construction on my surprise. Let me give you a cup of tea. I hope you did not get your feet wet in coming."

"Thank you; no sugar, please. The roads are abominably muddy; I ought to apologise for the state of my boots; but there's nothing to wet one. Not that I care about wet feet; I never coddle. I suppose that in summer this is quite a pleasant situation?" he added, turning the subject.

"Oh, yes," said Cherry. "We have a dear little lawn. It is at the bottom of the stream now, but in summer the stream is at the bottom of it, and we keep a boat there, and can go on the river whenever we like."

"Ah, quite so. Just the place to do the rural in then, but not the thing for winter. You should come into town, ma'am; there's always

something going on in London, even at the deadest season. And Miss Roper is quite wasted down here."

"This is my home," answered Mrs. Roper coldly. "I have neither the wish nor the power to leave it, and I should be sorry if my daughter could not be contented without gaiety."

"Oh, I get occasional runs to London," put in Cherry. "And even in winter you see we manage to have some summer indoors," directing his attention to the flowers.

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Goldthorpe, taking the suggestion with greater quickness than I should have expected from him. "You have a fine show, indeed. May I look at them a little closer? I do a little in primulas myself, or rather my head gardener does. He took first prize at the last show, but there was nothing there to match that plant in the middle."

After this, talk languished, and I had to do my best to help. Mr. Goldthorpe could neither find an excuse for staying, nor for going away. He picked up his hat from the carpet, changed it about from one hand to the other, and put it down again, more than once, while Cherry counted her bangles over and over again. At last, he pulled out his watch, and took a tremendous resolution.

"You'll excuse me, ma'am, but important business obliges me to leave by the 6.30 train. It won't do for me to miss it."

"On no account," Mrs. Roper assented, cordially. "The time of you gentlemen in business is so valuable that we could not attempt to detain you."

"But before I go, I should wish to speak a word to you in private, if you please, if Miss Roper and this lady will excuse me," with a comprehensive bow.

"I will trouble you to come into the dining-room, then," said Mrs. Roper, rising. "I know I need not apologise to Mrs. Singleton."

"No, indeed," I said; "but you must allow me to say good-bye first. It is high time for me to be going home." And home I went; but, as I afterwards heard the history of the conversation from Mrs. Roper, I am in a position to continue the narrative, notwithstanding.

Mr. Goldthorpe planted himself at one side of the little square table, and deposited his hat upon the red cloth, with an air of coming to business. Mrs. Roper sat facing him on the other side, ready for battle.

"I suppose, ma'am," he began, "that Miss Roper has informed you why I am here to-day."

"I think I told you, when you first came, Mr. Goldthorpe, that your arrival was unexpected by me."

"Ah! she left the explanations to me. Well, I am here to explain."

"Pray do not suppose that a friendly visit needs any explanation. I look upon yours to-day in that light: I beg that you will not ask me to regard it in any other."

"But I do ask you, ma'am. I came for a purpose; and when I have a purpose, I always carry it out—and, what's more, I succeed in it."

"It will be wiser, then, for you not to pursue one in which you have no prospect of success."

"Let there be no misunderstanding between us, ma'am," said Mr. Goldthorpe, hurriedly. "I have the highest possible esteem and respect for yourself, but it is your daughter that I want to marry."

Mrs. Roper nearly sprang from her chair in indignation, but insulted dignity gave her additional self-possession, and she replied:

"Although such a misapprehension might have naturally arisen, considering the respective ages of all concerned, yet I assure you, sir, that it never for a moment crossed my mind. My daughter told me that you had paid her considerable attention while in London; and I conceived that the reason of your presence here was to ask my consent to your suit."

"So it is, ma'am; so it is," said Mr. Goldthorpe, reassured; "and I hope I have it."

"On the contrary, I have been endeavouring, indirectly, to make you understand that it is useless to ask for it."

"Useless!" he cried. "You don't know what you're saying—you don't know who you're talking to."

"I beg your pardon, I know quite well."

"I daresay you think, because I'm a stockbroker, that I'm a speculator; and that my wife and children may be millionaires one day, and beggars the next. But I've seen too much of that sort of game. It's no business of anyone's what I do with the money I keep loose at my banker's; but there's 60,000*l.* invested in Government stocks and United States bonds and some good railways, that I haven't touched for ten years, and don't mean to. And when I marry, I'll settle every penny of that on my wife and her children; so that, if I went through the Courts next month, she should keep her carriage all the same."

"I will not attempt to discuss the honourableness of that arrangement," answered Mrs. Roper, icily. "I am aware that commercial honour is a different thing from what *I* have known by the name. My objection is of a different kind altogether."

"Is it my age?" broke in Mr. Goldthorpe. "I was only fifty-seven last birthday, and I'm stronger than most of the young fellows I know. Besides, I'll make her a better husband than a boy, that hasn't half sown his wild oats, and will be wanting his own way, instead of giving her hers."

"I must own that I think such a serious disparity of age a great objection," Mrs. Roper replied; "but that is not the only ground. Mr. Goldthorpe, has my daughter ever led you to believe that she loved you?"

"Why, I certainly thought the young lady did not seem

unfavourably disposed towards me. But, without having had it from her own lips, I should not like to use such a strong expression."

"I am glad to hear you say so; I did not believe she would have deceived you. Am I to understand that you love her?"

"Well, really, the fact that I am ready to ask her to be my wife is proof enough that I feel towards her as I ought. I'm not a sentimental man—never professed to be; and I don't know that I can get up a grand passion. But I like Miss Roper better than any young lady I ever met. She will make me a good wife; I'll make her a good husband; and, without boasting, I may say that when she is Mrs. Goldthorpe, there'll be a good many women who would give something to stand in her shoes."

"She will never be Mrs. Goldthorpe with my consent," said Mrs. Roper, rising.

"Not?" said Mr. Goldthorpe, blankly.

"Certainly not. If she wished to marry to poverty, should I not have a right to forbid her? And have I not a right to forbid her to marry to poverty of the heart, which is ten thousand times as miserable? If you had not money enough between you to live upon, you would recognise my right to say 'No.' You have not love enough between you to live upon, and I say it far more emphatically."

"Miss Roper is of age, I understand?"

"She is, Mr. Goldthorpe. I am perfectly aware that I have no legal right to hinder her from acting as she chooses; but any moral right that I have—I shall exercise to the full."

"Well, I shall give the young lady the opportunity of deciding for herself. I suppose I cannot see her here."

"I shall not make my house a prison for my daughter. She is at liberty to receive you if, after consideration, she wishes to do so. I refuse nothing but my personal consent to a marriage without affection, which must result in misery to one or both."

"You have no right, Mrs. Roper, to doubt my affection for your daughter, because I can't make speeches about it."

"I do not doubt its reality, Mr. Goldthorpe, but I doubt its adequacy; and I doubt hers for you still more. Be persuaded; think the matter over, and seek a more suitable partner. In any case, believe that I intend no discourtesy to yourself."

"Do you think it over, too, ma'am, and you'll see things more reasonably. I have to go to Paris to-morrow, but when I come back I'll run down again. Give my best compliments to Miss Roper; I brought a ring that I hoped to give her, but that will be for next time. Good evening, ma'am."

And he bowed himself out, leaving poor Mrs. Roper to face Cherry. I fancy she had small pleasure out of the fact that she was left the undoubted victor in that afternoon's campaign.

III.

Of course I did not like to visit Mead Cottage again in a hurry, as if I were anxious to hear what had happened in my absence; but I had not very long to wait. Mrs. Roper was one of those unfortunate persons whose mind and body act and re-act upon each other so closely, that it is always open to kind friends to call their mental sufferings indigestion, and their bodily ailments "nerves." She was at church on Sunday, but on Monday she was prostrate, and was very unwell for two or three days. Cherry ostentatiously blamed the damp, and I privately blamed Cherry. She would not send for me while her mother was actually ill, and there certainly was no occasion, as she was herself the cleverest and tenderest of nurses; but on Thursday I had a note from her, asking me to spend the whole of the next day with them, and mentioning that I should have to go round by the road, as the little foot-bridge was now quite under water.

"One more such victory, and you are undone, my poor friend," I remarked that Friday afternoon, after I had enjoyed Mrs. Roper's narrative of her encounter with Mr. Goldthorpe. "It has taken too much out of you."

"What does that matter?" she said. "It has given Cherry time to think again; and she only needs time for thought. My child could not do such a thing deliberately. This little illness of mine has been a fortunate thing. It has given us both occupation, and allowed us to hold our tongues. We should have vexed each other if we had been shut up together these wet days, and obliged to talk."

We were sitting in the drawing-room, Mrs. Roper reclining, invalid fashion, in an easy chair well lined with pillows, and wrapped in a large white shawl. Suddenly a loud knock came to the door. She started, and flushed painfully.

"It is that man again," she said. "Oh! I did not think it would have been so soon."

"Let me tell him that you are too unwell to see him," I said, making a move towards the door; but she stopped me.

"He does not want to see me; it is Cherry; and I promised that he should see her, if she chose. He must come in."

As we were speaking, the door was opened. It was Mr. Goldthorpe who had knocked, and he did ask only for Cherry; but it never occurred to stupid little Jane to do anything but show him into the drawing-room, while she went in great excitement to tell her. Of course he fell into a confusion of apologies and explanations when he saw the state of affairs, but he did not offer the best of all possible apologies by taking himself away. On the contrary, he discoursed about his journey to Paris, until Cherry appeared. She looked flushed and serious, and greeted him quietly.

After about ten minutes of company talk, she said:

"You will excuse me, I am sure, Mr. Goldthorpe; but now that

mamma is so unwell, she is my first object—and when you arrived, I was doing a little cooking for her, which I cannot leave to the servant. I must go back and see to it."

"Certainly," answered Mr. Goldthorpe; "don't mind me, I beg. I shall feel gratified by your not standing upon ceremony with me, and I am sure Mrs. Roper must feel an appetite for food cooked by your hands."

"Then I will say good-bye," said Cherry, holding out her hand.

"But aren't you coming back? I don't mind waiting. I only came from Paris this morning, and I have come down here at once to see you." His voice grew quite piteous.

"Oh, yes, I am coming back," said Cherry, glancing at her mother rather uncertainly. "But, you see, we are a little put out just at present."

Mrs. Roper's hospitable instincts now came uppermost.

"Suppose, dear, you combine that cookery for me with tea for everybody; Mr. Goldthorpe needs some refreshment, I am sure, after his tiring day; and Mrs. Singleton likes to go home early."

There was general acquiescence; Cherry departed to her household cares, and Mr. Goldthorpe and I talked Paris with redoubled vigour. In about half an hour, a pleasant and substantial meal appeared, over which Cherry presided. Her lover expanded in the presence of his goddess; he was radiant with good humour, paid compliments all round, especially to her, and actually told some anecdotes, at which he laughed very loudly himself. Cherry smiled amiably, and I thought of the days when she would know them all by heart, and have to laugh as dutifully the seventh time of hearing as the first.

After tea she sang us a couple of pretty songs, and Mr. Goldthorpe sat by the piano, and beat time. If there is any practice calculated to drive a singer distracted, it is that; and Cherry's forehead wrinkled, and she left out a verse of her second song.

"That's the sort of singing I like in a lady," he remarked when she had finished. "No fuss about it, no screaming or running all about the place; but just a pretty little song that you can enjoy after dinner. When I want professionals, I can pay for them."

This dubious compliment perhaps accounted for the slight bang with which Cherry shut the piano; and I rose to say good-night, knowing that Mrs. Roper must be tired, and hoping that Mr. Goldthorpe would follow my example, and postpone his proposal to a more favourable opportunity.

"I shall see you safe on the high road," said Cherry decisively. "Our lane is not in a state for you to travel by yourself in the dark. I'll get the lantern."

She speedily re-appeared, cloaked, and bearing the lantern; and of course Mr. Goldthorpe could do nothing else but offer to carry it. We started off, but did not go far. We had barely gone round the corner of the house when a lapping sound close by startled us. Mr.

Goldthorpe held the lantern lower, and it gleamed upon water lying on the ground walk. He held it higher, and it gleamed upon water covering the whole path, and we could hear the stream gurgling through the gate at the end.

"The flood must have risen tremendously fast," said Cherry. "Why, you came through this way three hours ago, Mr. Goldthorpe?"

"Upon my word, I couldn't have believed it," he said, much perturbed. "I never guessed anything of this sort was likely to happen."

"I wonder if I could wade it," I speculated.

"Impossible," said Cherry decisively. "The ground rather falls than rises beyond the garden-gate, as far as the first turn of the lane. You would find the water deeper the farther you went."

"And we could not manage the boat in the dark?"

"We could not get to it. It is laid up—as we thought, high and dry—on the mound near the shrubbery; but there is a stream between us and it now."

"Then what is to be done?" asked Mr. Goldthorpe.

"There is only one thing to be done," Cherry answered gaily. "You must resign yourselves to circumstances, and be our prisoners for to-night. We'll put you up somehow—you must not be too particular, and in the morning, if you can't make your escape in our own boat, we shall easily be able to signal someone to bring us a punt."

"I, for one, shall be contented to be a prisoner to so fair a gaoler," said Mr. Goldthorpe gallantly.

I re-appeared in the house, feeling somewhat discomfited; but Cherry and her lover were in high spirits. Explanations were made to Mrs. Roper, whom Cherry insisted on taking off to bed; and after she had disposed of her for the night, arrangements for the accommodation of her unexpected guests kept her busy away from us. Mr. Goldthorpe, sitting alone in the drawing-room with me, began to look on the shady side of his imprisonment.

"I suppose we are sure to be able to get a boat in the morning?" he questioned anxiously.

"It depends upon whether any come this way or not, I should say," I replied. "I must say that I cannot think what is to bring them."

"But if I don't get a boat, I can't get back to town; and I must be at my office at twelve to-morrow. I have a most important engagement."

"Then I hope you will get a boat."

"At any rate, this sort of thing can't last. The river will go down as fast as it came up, I daresay."

"Floods have been known to last three weeks without abating," I told him for his encouragement. I was willing that Cherry should see how cross he could be. In spite of his fine speeches, he was rapidly falling into that state of mind; and when Cherry announced that our rooms were ready, he made no attempt to detain her for the

tête-à-tête which now at length was possible, but took his candle, and marched away gloomily to his chamber. Cherry gave me her room, and went to her mother's; but I did not sleep very well in her little white bed, for the river whirled confusedly through my dreams.

With the first gleam of daylight I was at the window, and looked out upon a sea of brown waters. I afterwards learned that a weir had burst, which accounted for the rapid rise. The water was up to the very walls of the house, and flowing past it in a strong stream. Evidently, there was no possibility of escape from within. Was there any of rescue from without?

I did not feel very cheerful as I went down to breakfast, nor did Mr. Goldthorpe look so. He was standing at the dining-room window, watching for boats.

"This is a bad business, ma'am," he said, as I came in.

"I hope there is nothing worse before us than a few hours in comfortable quarters and pleasant society," I replied, trying to be cheerful.

"As to the society, there can be no doubt; the quarters are not quite the same thing. Habit, you know, ma'am, is second nature; and I must own that I find it difficult to dispense with certain little comforts."

At this juncture Cherry entered, followed by Jane with a tray, and I must say that Mr. Goldthorpe did full justice to the little comforts that were still at his disposal. Mrs. Roper was reported not so well, having had a wakeful night, and I knew to what to attribute it.

Would Mr. Goldthorpe use his opportunity? No man ever had a better. Here he was, shut up with his ladye-love for hours, her mother safe out of the way, and her other chaperon frequently sitting with the invalid. I knew at least one other who would have cared little in such a situation for floods outside and business in London, but thought himself in Paradise. Mr. Goldthorpe was of a different opinion. He kept perpetually fidgeting over to the window, looking out for the boat that never came, and interrupting all attempts at talk or occupation.

"It's no use, Mr. Goldthorpe," said Cherry at last. "Nothing seems to pass us except some poor man's swede turnips. You'd better occupy yourself in fishing for them. We may be thankful to have them for dinner in a day or two."

"For dinner!"

"Well, seriously, things look somewhat blue. We have very little room for keeping anything in this house, and we get most things in small quantities. The butcher was to have called this very day, and unless he takes boat to us now, we shall be short commons at dinner-time. The only things that we have a good supply of are flour, bacon, tea, and jam."

"We shan't starve, at any rate," I remarked, much relieved by the presence of tea in the list.

"But one can't live on flour and bacon," said Mr. Goldthorpe in dismay.

"Flour can be made into bread, and I shall proceed to effect the conversion, if necessary," laughed Cherry. "If we can't live on bread, bacon, and tea, for a day or two, we must be Sybarites."

"One need not be a Sybarite to object to living like a farm-labourer," Mr. Goldthorpe muttered. "Really, when one lives in such a place, one should make provision for what may happen."

Cherry did not reply, but left the room rather offended. By-and-bye she recovered her temper, and her sense of duty towards Mr. Goldthorpe. She returned to the drawing-room, and tried with all her might to entertain him. She sang to him until he got up and walked to the window, yawning, and looking out for boats. She played cribbage with him until he grew tired of beating her, and she grew tired of being beaten. She took her work, and waited for him to begin making love to her; but he never began. In the intense ennui of that day, the poor girl did ample penance for the sin of her flirtation with him.

At last, about the middle of the afternoon, an idea struck her.

"If you are so very anxious to go, Mr. Goldthorpe, can't you make an attempt to get the boat? It is only at the other side of the shrubbery, tied up, and the oars are in the house. I don't think the water can be above your knees anywhere between us and it, and once you had got to it, you would be all right."

"Let me tell you, Miss Roper," he replied ill-temperedly, "that it is not so easy to walk in a current of water up to one's knees; I should probably lose my footing. And when I had got the boat, it would be of no use. I am not accustomed to rowing, especially in such awkward places as this. I should certainly be upset, and drowned, and I prefer the chance of being starved."

Cherry subsided, and the day dragged through without any heroic attempt at remedy. We had what I should have thought a nice and sufficient little dinner, but for Mr. Goldthorpe's scarcely disguised disgust; and we ladies enjoyed an hour's peace, while he slept after it. We all went to bed early; and if ever a girl looked utterly fagged and worn-out, it was Cherry Roper on the night of that wet Saturday which was to have been her betrothal day.

IV.

Morning dawned, and a dreary light spread slowly over a dreary scene. We had agreed that ten o'clock would be quite soon enough for breakfast, and about that hour I wended my way downstairs. The hall-door was open, and Mr. Goldthorpe stood at it, staring out dismally at the prospect, and keeping up his everlasting watch for boats. So far from falling, the flood had risen in the night, and it was now nearly up to the step. Marked only by the tops of sub-

merged hedges and palings, the brown water stretched in front of us over miles of country. We could not tell how far it spread, for trees bounded our view; but under and around every visible object there was the dull gleam of water. The trees swayed in the current across the meadows, the pines dipped their needles into the quiet stream that overflowed the shrubberies, distant roofs seemed to rise out of the river, and we could hear a faint lowing, as of cows in distress. Every now and then something indistinguishable would float down the main stream, too far away for us to make out what it might be, though we strained our eyes; but never came a boat. Indeed, none could have come by way of the river; it would have been impossible for any to have lived in such a current. The sky was heavy, and looked full of rain; and there seemed no reason why the flood should ever go down.

It was not a cheerful sight, and I turned from it to meet Cherry in the dining-room.

"Breakfast is ready," she said. "We have eaten all our bread, and so I have made some hot cakes. But matters are growing serious. I find Jane was mistaken in telling me that we had plenty of flour; we have only about as much left as I have used this morning. The moral of that is—to-morrow we shall probably starve."

"I don't think we shall be left to starve," I said, as cheerfully as I could; "people will be sure to remember what a predicament we must be in."

"I don't know who there is to think much about us," said Cherry, drearily. "And that boat lying there, a few yards off! Oh, if we only had a *man* with us, instead of a fogey!"

The fogey was summoned to breakfast, and told the state of affairs, and that it was necessary to make our provisions go as far as we could. He only replied that of course a boat would come, and it was nonsense to starve ourselves; he, for one, was not going to do it. And accordingly, while Cherry and I ate only enough to keep us going, he made extra havoc among the precious cakes, by way of protest against our abstinence. Cherry's patience at last gave way, and when he made a momentary pause, she rose from table and carried away the dish. Mr. Goldthorpe glared after her.

"Polite, upon my word!" he remarked.

I could not stand any more of him just then, and left the room. I was going upstairs when I heard a sudden call from Cherry in the kitchen. I hurried to her; she was standing at the back-door, with clasped hands and gleaming eyes.

"A boat!" she cried; "a boat, coming here!"

I looked where she pointed, and, through one of the bare hedges, could see something moving in a neighbouring field.

"Let us call," I said; "it may not come to us."

"It is coming," said Cherry; "don't you trouble."

"I wonder who it can be?" I remarked innocently.

She turned, and flashed a look at me. "A friend of yours," she said, her eyes dancing with fun; "come to take you home to luncheon. There'll be all the more cakes for Mr. Goldthorpe's tea."

The boatman knew his way, apparently; he was feeling along the hedge for a thin place, where he could force his boat through, for of course it was impossible to open any gates. We could hear him breaking away boughs. Presently, there appeared among the thorns what proved to be the bow of a light river gig, and slowly the inmate pushed and pulled himself and his boat through. The instant that he had done so, however, he was in the full current of the stream which flowed past the lawn; his boat was whirled round, and swept away towards the river. He had been obliged to draw in his oars when passing her through the hedge, and now he could not at once get them into use. In that moment, how far he had been carried! Could he recover himself? We watched helplessly and breathlessly. There was not only the danger of the boat's being carried into the river, but of its being wrecked against something under water, which he could not see or know of. But he knew his ground. He let the stream carry him past the garden, and out into the meadow beyond. There, of course, the current was slacker, and he easily pulled aside out of it into the comparatively quiet water, where he could turn his boat round. We had rushed to one of the upstair windows, and could see the incidents of the perilous little voyage. Without encountering the stream a second time, the oarsman made his way into the garden through a weak place in the hedge at the bottom, as he had broken in from the field, and slowly poled himself up between the rose bushes. By that time the whole household was gathered at the door, to welcome Hugh Carfield. Of course it was he: Cherry had known it from the first, and I had not been long in guessing who was most likely to have come to our rescue.

"Are you all well?" shouted the young man, almost before he was within speaking distance.

"All well," responded Mr. Goldthorpe, with an air of responsibility. "I hope you have brought us provisions."

"Everything I could think of that would go in my boat," answered Hugh, bringing it up to the steps.

"You see I was right," said Mr. Goldthorpe, turning round to us. "I told you that a boat would come, and that such measures as Miss Roper proposed this morning were quite unnecessary. But young ladies always like to do the heroic."

It was so provoking that he *had* been right, that, if I had not been so hungry myself, I could almost have wished that relief had not come so soon. But by this time Mrs. Roper was shaking hands with our deliverer.

"I don't know how to thank you, Dr. Carfield," she said, "for coming to help us—and at such risk, too!"

"Don't take too much to yourself, mamma," laughed Cherry. "Dr.

Carfield would never have left Mrs. Singleton to starve." Then, in a lower tone she added, as he clasped her hand: "It was good of you to come. I was never so glad of anything in my life as to see your boat behind the hedge."

Hugh could find nothing nice to say, of course—Englishmen never can when they are the heroes of the situation; so he only asked how we had fared. After we had related our experiences (or some of them), a council of war was held, at which it was promptly and unanimously decided that Hugh should return to the town, and send punts at once to remove the whole party, the men being provided with hatchets to cut away the gates which blocked the lane. Mrs. Roper and Cherry would return with me to my house. He departed, taking a more circuitous and safer route than that by which he had come. Cherry watched him out of sight; and then we made a hasty but very cheerful supplement to our short breakfast, and proceeded to devote ourselves to the task of packing up what they needed to take with them, and putting the house in a state to be left empty. We were so absorbed in our work that we never heard the arrival of the first punt. The sound of voices outside, however, drew us to the house-door, just in time to see it pushing off, with Mr. Goldthorpe seated inside. When he caught sight of us he waved his hand, and called out:

"Excuse my not saying good-bye, ladies: important business—must catch next train; your boat will be up in a minute."

Cherry stood for a moment in speechless indignation, then burst out laughing.

"He is gone," she cried. "Hurrah! I never was so rejoiced to see anyone's back. The Old Man of the Sea was a joke to him; Michael Scott's familiar spirit was a pleasant companion. He is the worst incubus that ever a set of unfortunate women had on their shoulders for two interminable days!" Then turning to her mother, she added with intense gravity: "I am quite satisfied now, mamma, that I did right in discouraging Mr. Goldthorpe. You must see for yourself that it never would have done."

That was Cherry Roper's only peccavi, but it was quite enough for her mother. I doubt that even Hugh got much more out of her at any time; but if she kept her contrition to herself, and made confession to nobody, she at any rate made ample satisfaction for her fit of worldliness. For when Mr. Goldthorpe recovered himself, and wrote a formal proposal of marriage she refused him with equal formality; and a month or two later, her engagement to Hugh Carfield was announced. He is not exactly a poor man, but he is not likely ever to be a rich one; yet Cherry seems perfectly contented. She herself accounts for it by saying that the great merit of a doctor as a husband is that you don't have enough of his society to get tired of him.

VERA SINGLETON.

CHECKMATED.

SHE was so pretty! and it was such a charming blush with which she greeted him. Algernon Gregson was a very good-looking fellow himself, and he knew it. No one was better able to throw a fascinating empressement into words which meant nothing, and the only apparent object of his dark eyes was to make more decided love than his tongue might venture on.

Circumstances decidedly favoured lovers that glorious August day, when the pic-nic party landed from a steam-launch and roamed about the shady woods of lovely Cliefden. Many couples could find retirement there, the shade was so deep; and the only danger lay in the too great apparent security the thick undergrowth gave for the utterance of tender sentiments—it being quite possible that a soured bachelor, or implacable paterfamilias, might be roaming unseen within ear-shot.

There are never enough eligibles at a pic-nic—at least so mothers say; and it is well-known that those young men who are handsomest, who scull best, and give most life to everything, are undesirable matrimonial speculations.

Milly St. Aubyn had no mother to watch her, and her good-natured chaperone liked to see her happy—besides Algernon Gregson had not less than 500*l.* a-year, and Milly, who had nothing, could not look for a rich husband.

But no matrimonial intentions disturbed the mind of the handsome Algernon. He was simply enjoying the time and the opportunity, and thinking it a vast pity such a pretty girl as Milly should be a pauper. People were all paupers in Algernon's eyes unless they had at least as much as himself; but he did not dislike pretty paupers, and always flirted with them. To himself he never admitted the possibility of marrying anything less than an heiress, and he knew of one now who was quite prepared to marry him.

"Going to Scotland!" said Algernon, as Milly's gentle voice told him her autumn plans; "perhaps we shall meet there. I am promised some shooting shortly."

Milly's ready blush came up, and her soft, merry blue eyes were raised in pleasure. She did not know that the heiress Algernon intended for himself lived in Scotland, and was able to promise shooting! She was not quite in love—but very near it, and the woods and their bird-voices seemed hurrying her on. Besides, her cavalier had decided that he must not see this pretty pauper again, so was as fascinating as possible.

A few days later Milly started for the north, feeling just a little pang of disappointment that Mr. Gregson had never called since the picnic. She spent a night in Edinburgh, and then went on to the end of her journey, where some lively young cousins met her, and during a long country drive to her uncle's place they told her all the news and plans for pleasure.

"We've got ten visitors besides you, Milly, and you won't be a visitor at all! because mother has just had another bed put in my room for you. She always rolls up the 'girls' into bundles when the shooting begins, and gives our nice rooms to the fat old ladies and people who invite us to town in the season," announced Gertie, with a laughing toss of the head.

"I'm so glad I shall be amongst you all!" said Milly, looking admiringly at the distant hills, and a winding, silvery river. "This does feel invigorating after stuffy London!"

"Here we are," cried Lilian, a pretty, fair little thing. "Mamma is there to welcome you, coz, and gouty Sir Thomas has hobbled out behind her, because we told him what a beauty you were!"

"For shame, Lil," said Gertie, laughing; "look how she blushes!"

"Welcome to Scotland, my dear," said aunt Myra, with an affectionate embrace. "This is our old friend, Sir Thomas Wye—he knew your poor mother well."

"And am delighted to meet a daughter who resembles her," said the old gentleman, whose face was very fat, and the colour of it a mixture of red and blue. "You did not say too much," he added, nodding to Gertie. Then the girls carried off their cousin to the far-away room, where her luggage soon followed. Lilian announced:

"To-night you will meet our 'heiress'—Annie Lyons. She is here for a few days, and you will like her. She's not pretty."

"Heiresses never are," said Gertie; "that's quite fair."

"She has heaps of admirers, though," said Lilian, shaking her head.

"Her fortune has!" laughed Gertie; scornfully.

"It's all the same—nobody looks at *us* when she is here!" dolorously pursued Lilian.

"Make haste and dress, girls," cried Gertie—"there's the bell." Off flew Lilian, and the others quickly arrayed themselves in simple, pretty toilettes, and ran downstairs.

"Annie—this is our London cousin, Milly St. Aubyn," said Gertie, breaking through the little band which surrounded a small, insignificant-looking girl with light brown hair, light grey eyes, and a very pale face. A pleasant smile redeemed the face from absolute plainness, as Miss Lyons cordially extended her hand.

"I have often heard of you, Miss St. Aubyn—and am very glad to meet you."

"Yes," said Gertie; "she will be a new ornament for your picnic next week. Oh! how I hope it will be fine!"

Fervent male responses were heard, for this picnic meant a morning's shooting for the men, and a luncheon on the hill-side, where many fair faces would endeavour to rival the grouse in male appreciation.

At this moment dinner was announced, and Milly's cousin, Laurie Gordon, who had only just arrived at home, came to escort her in.

"That's right, Laurie; look after Milly," said old Mr. Gordon, kindly, as he sought his own partner in one of the stout visitors of whom Gertie had spoken.

"Such a good thing my father is a spare man," whispered Laurie, as he watched the egress of the couple through a not very wide door. Milly laughed silently, and Laurie turned a look of cousinly admiration on her. "What a horrid little thing you were two years ago, Milly! You called me names for flogging my dog."

"So I might now if you did it again!" announced Milly's soft voice, decidedly.

Dinners are all much alike in country houses, and Milly was glad to be away from the places of honour, and chat unreservedly with Laurie.

"There have been all sorts of bets on the heiress marrying somebody this season," he announced.—"There are plenty of aspirants."

"Are you one?" quoth Milly.

"Not I! My ambition is small and my bent not matrimonial; but she *is* so rich, you know. Some big-wigs are in the hunt. They say a man who was here last year has most hopes, though—a London fellow."

That night the three female cousins sat long over their hair-brushing, and the heiress was fully discussed.

"She didn't look at one of them as she looked at that handsome Mr. Gregson last year, Lil," said Gertie.

Milly brushed vigorously.

"Well, he's coming next week. By the way, have you ever met a Mr. Algernon Gregson, Milly?" asked Lilian.

"I think I have," said the quiet voice. But something in the tone made Gertie glance in the glass, where she saw Milly with a pale face.

"Well, I shall be thankful if she marries *anyone*," cried Lilian, as she rose to depart. "It's a horrid bore having to entertain her aspirants."

There was old friendship and much confidence between Gertie and Milly—they had been at school together.

"Milly, do you *care* for Mr. Gregson?" whispered Gertie.

"Hush, Gertie—it's not that! but he seemed to care ——"

"I knew the sort of fellow he was!" cried Gertie, vehemently. "Nothing but money will suit him; but he cares no more for poor Annie than for me!"

Quiet tears fell on Milly's cheek, yet she smiled as she clasped Gertie's hand. "Don't mind—the dream was pleasant, but I am glad it's broken, and broken so soon."

Gertie kissed her, and said nothing—but she thought a great deal.

How it was arranged I know not, but on the day of the picnic, when Algernon Gregson drew confidently near the baskets on the hill-side, he beheld the heiress and Milly arm-in-arm, ready with smiles of pretty indifference for the handsome fortune-hunter. He had suggested the possibility of meeting Milly in Scotland, but he had never thought or meant it to be like this. His suave accents were less dulcet than usual—he had never tried to make love to two at a time.

"Fancy meeting you in this charming spot," he ventured to Milly.

"An unforeseen pleasure!" said the pretty pauper, with a steady flash of her blue eyes, and no soft blush.

The heiress was coolly polite, and kept constantly with Milly. Gertie was in no humour to encourage the attentions of a man who had trifled with Milly's feelings. Lilian was looking very happy under an umbrella, where a devoted swain fed her plate with dainties, and two homely Scotch girls and three matrons of elderly years were all that remained for the luckless Adonis!

Still he ventured that evening to propose to the pale little heiress, trusting in the impression he had made the year before. He met with a decided refusal. And fate was really hard upon him, for next morning Milly was missed from the party: had been summoned away, Gertie maliciously announced close to him, by the death of an uncle who had left her a *large* fortune.

Mr. Algernon Gregson sent his shooting equipments to London, and started on a tour through Switzerland, to recruit his shattered nerves.

MINNIE DOUGLAS.

M. ELLEN STAPLES. R. AND E. TAYLOR

BEFORE HE COULD EVEN GUESS HER INTENTION, SHE HAD SNATCHED A LETTER FROM HIS HAND.

WINIFRED POWER.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A LAST INTERVIEW.

IN these days, Winifred Power often reflected mournfully on the curious mode in which her past had dropped away from her. Her mother had formed new ties; her adopted mother, Mrs. Russe counted for nothing in her life; Gertrude was missing; Mark estranged. All that remained to her was Martha Freake, of whose existence two years before she had hardly known; and now it wa all too visible that Martha herself must soon go. She was growing rapidly weaker; daily more in need of tending; and Winifred's time was almost exclusively absorbed in nursing her. Dolly, indeed, was willing enough to help; but she had her lessons to give, and, moreover, Martha cared for nobody but Winifred to be with her. She did not ever say this; she remained exquisitely unselfish to the last; but Winifred divined her. And these last few days of constant care seemed to the generous girl very little to give to one whose life had been so devoid of joy. The pain of seeing Martha die was largely made up of regret for the love and the hope that she had never known.

Some such thought Winifred expressed one day; when Martha said to her, "Yet you throw away your own hopes with both hands."

"Admitting that to be true, they are at least mine to throw away. I have not been defrauded of them."

"I suppose I was very strange when you first knew me?"

"A little. But you are utterly different now."

This was quite true. A kind of solemn gentleness had come over Martha, which sometimes almost awed Winifred; for she felt that such calm must be a forerunner of death. After a little, Martha spoke again.

"When I recall the long years of monotonous agony that I spent before you came, I seem to myself to have been under a torturing spell. I was like the people in fairy tales whom an evil enchantment

bereaves of human faculties. All that seemed alive in me at times was a dumb, unceasing sense of pain. And whenever this depression ceased, as I think it did with a certain regularity, I became unnaturally excited—eager—unquiet. And, what I never could shake off in this second phase, was a cruel restlessness of mind—an unceasing whirl of torturing recollections. Ah, Winifred! your invitation to come and live with you stilled that demon-dance for ever. With you I have known over again the rapture of perfect rest."

Winifred made no answer. Only softly stroked the thin grey hair from Martha's temples, and kissed her sunken cheek.

"A lady is waiting in the salon to see you," said Dolly, putting her head inside the door; and added, when Winifred had joined her in the passage; "Who do you suppose it is? Who, but Aunt Mary!"

"Aunt Mary!" exclaimed Winifred, in surprise, and hurried to the modest sitting-room, dubbed by Dolly a salon. Mrs. Russell, large, robust, fretful, upheld as she had ever been by the abiding sense of her grievances, was seated in a commodious arm-chair—every line of her attitude a protest. With a warm rush of associations that had a joy of its own, Winifred went forward, her hand outstretched; but Mrs. Russell did not relax in any way from her air of stony resentment.

"When did you come? Are your friends the Bonnards with you? Why have you not written? I would have gone to meet you. Are you quite well? I ——" began Winifred, pouring out all these questions eagerly, one after another.

"I arrived last night—alone of course: what am I that anybody should bear me company? I did not write, for I presumed that you were busy: are you not always busy about everything except that which, in my day, would have been considered your duty? As to myself—*you* are well: what does it matter how I am?"

"I should not like you to be suffering," murmured Winifred, quite disconcerted.

"You are very good," was the icy reply. A pause, during which Mary's large, cold grey eyes travelled from one piece of furniture to the other, in the little room.

"Will you take off your bonnet?" resumed Winifred.

"I am very well as I am. I expected to find you in a garret. But I ought to have remembered that a person who spends the better part of her earnings on herself can naturally enjoy more comfort than when she remembers the claims of others upon her."

"Dolly Hatherley helps to support the household, Aunt Mary. And you *must* know that a large share of my earnings goes to relieve a need that is not my own," retorted Winifred, turning pale under the very sternness of her own rebuke.

"She is not yet dead, then, your friend?"

No answer from the girl, only a look that should have pierced Mary

Russell like a spear had she been capable of feeling it. But it merely irritated her, because making her a little ashamed of the deliberate callousness of her own question, which had been simply intended to wound Winifred.

"You might answer, I think, instead of staring theatrically, and insulting your poor aunt. If your uncle were alive, you would not dare to treat me in such a way."

"For his sake I would do anything for you—*anything*: except so far condone the wrong you once worked and have never righted, as to sit patiently by and hear you speak heartlessly of your victim."

Mrs. Russell burst into a harsh laugh. "Victim, indeed!" she exclaimed, struggling to speak through the hysterical rage that threatened to choke her. "It is part of your Pharisaism to remind me for ever of the past. You think to exalt your own virtue by it: or, rather, what you call virtue, and I call selfish hypocrisy. I am only a commonplace person, but I can see through fine words and false pretences as well as anybody else. Do you suppose I cannot understand your flimsy affectation of being more unforgiving than my 'victim?' In old days she would not have hurt a hair of my head. If she would punish me now it must be *your* fault."

Winifred stood petrified; perhaps for the first time in her life, almost scared; so unexpected was this outburst of rage, and to her so revolting in its utter stupidity. The very way in which Mary had delivered her speech gave it a kind of horror.

"I do not understand you," she exclaimed at last, amazement being the first of her many feelings to find expression.

"I understand myself," answered her aunt, returning to quietness. "And I daresay Martha Freake will understand me also."

"She is dying," said Winifred.

"But not dead. I know she is not dead, and I will see her." And she rose.

"See her? Why?" cried the girl, springing to the door to bar its passage. "Aunt Mary, be merciful. Every breath that she draws now is a pain to her. One moment's agitation might kill her!"

"You had better let me pass, Winifred. I know more than you think. Stand aside, I say." She made an imperious gesture, and her voice rose to shrill fury.

"Not until you promise me to be calm," answered Winifred, stubbornly persistent.

Exasperated, Mary Russell seized her by the wrists and, surprise giving her the advantage, absolutely flung the petrified girl aside. Then she threw open the door, stepped swiftly across the passage, and, helped by Heaven knows what instinct, made straight for the dying woman's room. Winifred followed, trembling in every limb, but resolute to shield Martha, come what might. On the threshold of the sick chamber Mary paused an instant, and her whole appearance underwent a sudden, surprising change. Her large figure seemed to

shrink, to grow smaller; her heated features composed themselves to something approaching a smile; cringing humility was expressed in every line of her. She crossed the room with stealthy tread, paused beside the bed, and put out her hands saying, "Well Patty?"

Martha had been lying up to that moment among her pillows, stretched out in her weakness almost as straightly as on a bier. Something of the rapt surprise of eternity was already in her eyes, and she seemed as a rule to notice little that was going on around her. Half-an-hour's conversation such as that she had just had with Winifred would exhaust her for the remainder of the day. She would then lie quite still, letting people come and go, fixing on them sometimes her mournful eyes, but giving otherwise no sign that she was aware of their presence.

Not until Mary stood beside the bed did she seem to observe her: she mutely turned upon her a long, serenely-questioning glance.

Mary's face fell a little, and she broke into a nervous laugh. "You do not remember me, perhaps?"

"Yes; I remember you. You are Mary Hatherley."

"Not Hatherley any longer now—Russell. You have not forgotten poor Walter?" Mary spoke jauntily. "You know he is dead. I have been very unhappy all my life, Patty."

All at once, to Winifred's amazement, terror even, Martha raised herself and sat upright. She lifted her wasted hands and holding them between herself and her cousin, uttered the one word, "Go!"

"Martha!" The fretful tones of the protest rang through the room.

"Go!" repeated the dying woman, in just the same voice as before—a voice of passionless command. A torrent of spite and rage swept over Mary's face but for some reason she controlled herself.

"Now, Martha, don't be unkind. You are feeling poorly, I dare say; not quite yourself. I am sure this is a horrid room for you—so little air. And doubtless you have been prejudiced against me. I am such an unfortunate creature, nobody has ever made allowances for me; and perhaps in a few things I have not behaved quite well. But repentance washes out sins, you know. I hope you are not going to forget that. You used always to be a good Christian. And I am so lonely—you must come home with me ——"

"*Go!*" And Mrs. Russell, thus checked in the flow of her wheedling self-justification, stood with parted lips of dismay.

"Aunt Mary, I entreat of you, come away!" cried Winifred, half-terrified herself at the new strength in Martha's voice and the stony calm of her face.

"I won't go," shrieked Mrs. Russell, bursting into tears. "It is you, standing there with your solemn air, that prevents her listening to me. I dare say you have been signaling to her from behind my back. She was always weak, but she loved me. Martha, tell this girl who has come between us that you loved me!"

"Why have you come? What is it you want?"

"What do I want? Patty, how strange you are! I heard you were ill, and I am sure it is very natural that I should wish to see you again. And I want you to come to me, I have told you so already. I should have had you long ago, only that it wouldn't be unfortunate me if I had not been always so poor. Walter—well, he's dead now, and I suppose I must not blame him; but his prospects did not turn out at all what we expected in the old days. As for John—you know how *wicked* he was, Patty; he behaved badly enough to you, and, what was more, prevented me from ever explaining things. But all that is past and gone. Now I am my own mistress; not rich, for people with great professions of generosity still manage to keep me out of my own: but I have a little; I am alone, with not a soul to care for me; I think it very likely that I have not long to live, and I should so much like to spend the last days of my existence (wretched enough it has been!) with you, dear Patty."

Mary paused, quite breathless; enchanted with her speech and her various professions, which sounded so well as even to deceive herself. Finding that Martha did not answer, she advanced a step nearer, and again coaxingly put out her hand.

"And it was for this that you came; now, when I am on the brink of the grave? You wished to poison my latest moments—to remind me, I having nearly forgotten it, that the world is fuller of hate than of love, of falsehood than of truth, of cruelty than of tenderness? You would have me go into eternity with a double blasphemy on my lips—the blasphemy of pretending to forgive you, Mary Hatherley; the blasphemy of diminishing by that pretence the full acknowledgment and perfect sense of the goodness, the sweetness, and the generous pity of the girl whom you have just defamed?"

It would be impossible to describe how Martha uttered these words—her voice vibrating without one tone of passion in it, her eyes glowing with a sombre fire, her wasted face illumined with a light so far removed from earthly feeling that it was like the light of prophecy. Winifred dared not speak or move: she was awe-stricken in the presence of a power which she had never suspected and could not understand.

But with Mary, want of comprehension meant want of reverence and of shame.

"Eternity?" she echoed, harshly, "you are well prepared indeed to face it. If these are your Christian feelings ——"

"Hush!" said Martha. "If I have no forgiveness, it is because you have no remorse. The love I once had for you, my cousin, has not turned to hatred; and I would hurt you as little now as in the past. No thought of anger against you has troubled the long agony of my farewell to this world. But as I have parted, one by one, with God's greatest gifts—with joy, with faith, with hope, in the end well-nigh with reason—I have gained at least that clearer insight by which

I now can read your soul. And I tell you that in assuring you of pardon, I should but utter a mockery of the promise divinely given to the sinner who repents. Across the gulf set between us by your wanton, unexpiated wrong, we can never clasp hands. At the most, I can pity—profoundly pity you for your heart unthawed by love and your eyes unsealed by truth. Because of all the gladness that you have not known, and can never know, I am sorry for you—Mary."

Her voice fell to a cadence of solemn pathos. Winifred covered her face with her hands; and at last a chord, not of feeling, indeed, but of superstitious terror, vibrated in Mary Russell. She retreated from the bed with a shuddering cry, shrill in its feeble and petulant protest against the judgment that had overtaken her. Winifred, roused by it, looked up; then sprang towards Martha, frightened at the grey, awful change that she saw stealing over her face. Mary's hysterical sobs grew louder, and Winifred turned to her with a distracted look: how should she induce her to go? At this moment she became aware that Dolly was in the room; since when, or summoned by what instinct, she did not know. And, before she had time to speak, her little friend went up to Mrs. Russell and spoke in a tone of cool authority.

"I think you had better come with me to the salon, Aunt Mary."

Strange to say, Mary went, limply protesting indeed, but incapable of true resistance.

"Sit down there," said Dolly, when they reached the sitting-room. She pointed to a sofa; on to which Mary subsided and gave way to louder weeping.

"I should try to calm myself," resumed Dolly, composedly—as composedly as a doctor to an excited patient.

"How c—c—can I calm myself?" shrieked Mrs. Russell. "I am the most m—miserable woman on the face of the globe. N—nobody cares for me; everybody insults me. I am robbed and neglected and t—taken advantage of in every way, by the vipers that I have nourished in my bosom."

"Ah!" remarked Dolly. "I will make you some tea." And she set about it; brought the cups; fetched some buscuits; lighted a spirit lamp, and sat down to wait for the water to boil.

"Martha always had a nasty twist in her character; but now I think she is a little mad: don't you?" and Mrs. Russell, somewhat cheered, raised swollen features of enquiry towards Dolly.

"Trouble does affect the mind very often; and Miss Freake has had a great deal of trouble," responded that little person: and somehow the tone of her commonplace words made her aunt wince. She changed the subject.

"I never expected to find you so well lodged," she remarked, resuming her criticism, apparently a hostile one, of the room.

"I don't know whether one can be considered well lodged au

cinquième au dessus de l'entresol, and with hardly space in any room to whip a cat," answered Dolly.

"Nevertheless, rents are very dear in Paris, and this apartmen must cost something more than a song. How much do you pay? continued Mrs. Russell, abruptly.

"I really don't know. I give Winifred what I can spare out of my earnings, and she controls expenses. Latterly she has been fortunate in having some portraits to paint, and in selling a picture."

So that, what with her earnings and yours, and Martha's income you must be quite comfortable?"

"*Martha's income!* Miss Freake has not enough for daily meat," exclaimed Dolly, with characteristic energy of denial.

Mary bit her lip; and the tea being ready now, accepted a cup in silence.

The door opened, and Winifred put in a pale face. "Dolly, I want you: and please, dear, go to the door if anybody rings: I have sent Justine for the doctor. Oh, Dolly, Martha is dying!" she whispered, outside the drawing-room door.

Dolly's eyes filled with tears: for her emotions were very easily stirred in these days. "You will call me if I can do anything: and, Freda, I must say good-bye to her."

"Yes, yes, dear. But keep your aunt away."

"I will do my best. Do you know what has brought her?—She thinks Martha has money."

"Money!" Winifred repeated the word in amazement: but too full of sorrow and of occupation for further comment, she made Dolly a sign to return to the salon, and herself re-entered the bed-chamber. Dolly found Mrs. Russell very suspiciously near the door.

"What has happened?"

"Miss Freake is dying," was the young girl's curt reply.

"I must see her," began Mary.

"You will wait until the doctor comes, if you please," interrupted Dolly, with the sudden peremptoriness that belongs only to the born ruler. Mary looked baffled, but even her stupidity was conscious of the uselessness of further efforts; so she resumed her seat in sullen silence, and Dolly mounted guard over her.

Just at sunset Winifred again appeared. "Come," she said, her face as pallid as though her vigil had been counted in nights instead of hours. Dolly went noiselessly. Mrs. Russell followed, with a look in which doggedness struggled with fear.

In the sick-room, only the muffled noise of the street broke the stillness. Martha was lying quite peacefully; her life just ebbing, without a sign.

"Good-bye," murmured Dolly, weeping: but she did not stoop to kiss or touch her, finding Death, now that she looked upon it, more awfully solemn than she had guessed. At the sound of the farewell, Martha opened her eyes and the palest flicker of a smile broke the

sunken immobility of her face. She moved her head a little as though wishing Winifred to raise it, and in the very instant that this was done, she died.

Mary Russell, standing at the foot of the bed, had possibly spoken; but if so, the living did not heed, and the dead could not hear her.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER.

It was not for some two or three hours after Martha's death that Winifred joined the others in the sitting-room.

She found them very silent; Dolly's eyes were swollen with tears, and Mrs. Russell's face was full of resentful brooding.

"Do you sleep here to-night, aunt?" asked the girl, sinking wearily into a chair.

"I presume I shall be in the way."

"No, indeed. I will give you up my bed, if you do not mind sharing the room with Dolly. It is nothing to me to sleep on a sofa."

"It was not the want of room that I alluded to. I shall certainly stay."

"Then I think you might say, 'Thank you,'" muttered Dolly under her breath. Winifred did not say anything; she only raised her hand to her head with a tired gesture, repressive of supreme indifference at the moment to insinuations and suspicions of all kinds. Mary, however, could not leave her in peace.

"Will my nephew—will Mr. Mark Hatherley be sent for?"

Winifred started. In the emotion the words gave her she forgot to note their scornful intonation.

"I do not know. I have not thought about it. Do you think I ought to send for him?"

"Of course you ought. I am sure if anybody owes poor Martha the last tribute of respect, it is Mark's father's son," interposed Dolly promptly.

Her aunt looked at her half-interrogatively, half-angrily. "What do you mean, Dorothy?"

"Just what I say."

"Oh, hush! Please hush!" The wrangle jarred on Winifred's nerves; she could not bear it.

"You are very impertinent," resumed Mrs. Russell, still addressing her younger niece. "I am not surprised at it, for you have been in a bad school lately to learn either gratitude or good manners. Most people would consider it very natural that I should seek a little peace and comfort with my two nieces, one of whom was adopted by myself, while the other owes everything to my brother; but I know that I am not welcome; I am aware that you look upon me as an in-

truder: you had arranged everything nicely, you two, and I have come to spoil your plans. Nevertheless, I shall not go away; for I have very good claims, and I intend to make them heard. I have been very patient, too patient. In the past I asked for nothing. But an end must come even to hypocrisy and scheming; and in the future I shall always assert my rights."

"Aunt Mary," said Dolly, in a tone of serious politeness, "I think you are a little out of your mind. You looked, when you were saying all that, exactly like the last portrait taken of my grandfather, which hangs in the dining-room at The Limes. He has the look of a man who broods over things until they become distorted; and I have often heard, that, before he died, his suspiciousness amounted to a disease. It seems to me that you are growing like him in character. There *is* something warped about us all."

"Dolly! I will not have you speak in such a way," broke in Winifred, almost angrily.

"I am sorry, Freda, to annoy you," was Dolly's unshaken reply; "but I cannot sit here quietly and hear you insulted and abused in your own house. I don't say anything about myself, or call it my house, because I contribute so little, and because I certainly should not be here if it were not for you. You know my opinion about you. I have often told you that you are too high-flown, and all the rest of it. And I doubt if you will ever be properly appreciated by many people. But at any rate I know that you are unselfish, kind, and noble, and when persons come here to worry and annoy you, I treat them at the worth of their intentions, and not at the value of the authority they may assume that kinship gives. Ties of blood are all very well, but common justice and honesty and elementary politeness are better."

"Oh Dolly!" cried Winifred, filled with such variety of feelings that she hardly knew whether to laugh or to cry.

The light of Dolly's self-satisfaction was still on her bonny face when Justine announced that a lady was outside, and would take no denial; although assured that neither Mademoiselle Power nor Mademoiselle Dolly could be expected to receive visitors on this mournful evening.

"Let her come in," said Winifred: and a tall, graceful figure darkened the doorway.

"Gertrude!" exclaimed Winifred, below her breath.

Gertrude came forward with a great affectation of indifference; but it covered a world of subdued excitement. She did not immediately recognise Mrs. Russell, who was sitting with her back to the light: and was put out at the presence, as she supposed, of a stranger. She had been chilled, too, at the news of Martha's death, which had fallen intrusively (as the solemn realities of life have a knack of doing) into the midst of her seething self-pre-occupation.

"I am sorry to have come at such a moment, Winifred ——"

"Dear Lady Hatherley!" interrupted Winifred, "don't take that tone. When did you come? Where have you been?"

Gertrude did not answer immediately, for Mrs. Russell had risen and spoken ungraciously some words of sullen greeting. It was not to be wondered at that she should regard her beautiful young sister-in-law with very scanty favour, and Winifred expected Gertrude to meet her with a stiffness equal to her own. But for the momen personal prejudice in Lady Hatherley seemed to be swallowed up in some other feeling or mixture of feelings which Winifred could not exactly make out. There was surprise in her manner, and perhaps a little suspicion.

"I want to speak to you alone," she said to Winifred.

"Then come into the bed-room. Dolly, I suppose you had better remain here." Dolly looked rather crestfallen.

"Did——was it Mr. Dallas, your brother, I mean, who brought you back?" she asked eagerly, as Gertrude neared the door, and Winifred paused indulgently to leave time for the answer.

Lady Hatherley answered that she had arrived by herself, that she knew nothing whatever about her brother. Upon which Dorothy's curiosity fell below zero, and she submitted very patiently to the prospect of a fresh tête-à-tête with her exasperated and sulky aunt.

Once in the bed-room, and in answer to Winifred's first question as to the cause of her long disappearance, Gertrude burst out into one of her old tirades; in which the iniquities of Sir John, the calumnies circulated at Elmsleigh, the suspicions of everybody, her happiness at the Grahams' and her disgust at being forced to leave them, were mixed up with her invariable wealth of self-pity, her usual mad despair at her destiny, and her customary railing at the imbecility of the world.

She poured it all out so rapidly that Winifred could not manage to put in a word for a long time, and it was only when Gertrude at last paused from sheer exhaustion, that she quietly said: "But, my dear, nobody suspects you any more."

Gertrude sat bolt upright and stared at her. She had been nursing her scare so long as to warm it into a very respectable entity, and its sudden destruction fell upon her with the force of a blow. Very dimly too she began to perceive that she might have been a little—just a very little—ridiculous.

"I—I don't understand."

Then Winifred—in possession since the morning, of her mother's letter, in which Mrs. Burton had said: "I am told now that *(doubtless through some judicious hushing up*, of which we shall never know the *truth)* the coroner's jury have decided for accidental death;" aware too of all the accounts that had reached the Dallases from The Limes—proceeded to enlighten Gertrude as to the events which had taken place since her precipitate departure.

She carefully suppressed, of course, all unfavourable comments, and laid great stress on Mark's efforts, and his own and Dick's anxiety.

That all this gratified Gertrude was evident. In fact, relief at the result of the inquest, and the sense of having occupied a great number of people about herself for more than a fortnight, combined to put her into quite a genial mood, and inclined her to lend a willing ear to Winifred's suggestion that she should return to her own family.

"It is not that I am not glad to have you, dear; but I know that your mother has hungered and thirsted for the sight of your face and as for Georgie, she has been in the finest effervescence of sisterly partizanship that I ever witnessed in my life."

"I always said there was good in the child," remarked Gertrude magnificently.

"Then you *will* go home?"

"To oblige you, Winifred, I will make the experiment. But if they lecture me, I shall leave again ——*at once.*"

"Very well, dear," answered Winifred patiently; shrewdly suspecting that this dauntless declaration covered a real desire for shelter and repose. "Dolly shall go with you. I should like her to tell them ——about poor Martha."

"Did Mrs. Russell worry her?"

The question surprised Winifred. "There was a dreadful scene," she replied. "But have you any special reason for asking, Gerty?"

"Oh, no!" Yet the tone was doubtful.

They returned to the sitting-room, and Dolly was bidden to put on her hat; also, thanks to Winifred's thoughtfulness, to telegraph to Mark acquainting him with Gertrude's reappearance and Martha's death. All of which was done.

This news brought the two young men to Paris with the smallest possible delay; and the next evening Richard Dallas walked in upon his assembled family. Gertrude having been made tremendously much of for four-and-twenty hours was in the highest good-humour, and actually went forward to greet him with an affectionate smile.

"Are you not glad to see me again? she enquired, a little provoked at the extreme coolness of his manner.

"Enchanted," he answered. "But I should have been still more so a fortnight ago, when your reappearance would have possessed the singular charm of appropriateness. However, I must not complain; for your amiable vagaries procured me a very pleasant fortnight at The Limes with Hatherley, who, though somewhat freezingly high principled, is a rattling good fellow."

And Dick, sauntering forward, bestowed a kiss upon his stepmother, pulled Georgie's ear, nodded to his father, and mentioned that he should like some supper.

"Dear Gerty has been giving us a charming account of her stay at the Grahams'; they seem such kind people! I really must write to-morrow and thank them," said Mrs. Dallas, an hour later.

"You arrived last night, I understand," said Richard, abruptly addressing his sister. "But you left the Grahams' on the morning of the previous day. Where did you spend the intermediate time?"

Gertrude tossed her head. "With my uncle, Ralph Mercer."

Mrs. Dallas gave a cry, and dropped the work. She had not heard her brother's name for years, and was almost painfully affected.

"Where did you meet him?—How did you know him? Be good enough to explain," commanded Mr. Dallas, curtly.

"I knew him in Turin," answered Gertrude: at which a certain wave of embarrassment passed over her hearers. The reader will remember that she had gone as a teacher to a school in Turin, after the Marseilles adventure, and this was a subject to which her family never alluded. "He had drifted there somehow, I really never enquired how, and was professor of caligraphy (that was what they called it) at the school."

"I think I remember to have heard that some forms of caligraphy —such as the imitative—were much in his line," interposed Mr. Dallas, grimly.

"He was very poor, and very miserable, being just then at one of his lowest ebbs, for he has wonderful ups and downs," continued Gertrude. "He guessed my identity from my name; stopped me in the street one day; asked me a few questions, and claimed me for his niece. At the same time he begged me not to mention, even to any of you, that he had met me. In fact, he was not known in Turin under his own name, and he was full of mysteries altogether."

"Poor dear Ralph!" exclaimed Mrs. Dallas, wiping her eyes. "What a comfort you must have been to him, Gerty."

"When Dick got me that place at The Limes, Ralph was in London, brought thither by what adventure I cannot tell, and calling himself, as at Turin, Colonel Quince. He had apparently had a stroke of good luck, for he was living in quite luxurious lodgings, and giving himself the airs of a millionaire. I kept up a kind of connection with him, and it was fortunate I did so. For there came a moment, as you know, when, thanks to the evil destiny that governs all my affairs, I was without a friend, or a place to go to, until it occurred to me to seek shelter and help from him."

"He always had a kind heart," said Mrs. Dallas, gently, and that was all the answer Gertrude got to her flourish.

"Why did he write to you so often at The Limes?" questioned Dick.

"For money," replied Gertrude, promptly, but turned rather red.

"And what became of the proceeds of your jewels?"

"I asked no questions," she said, loftily.

A sardonic laugh from Dick; then Mr. Dallas, in his turn, put a question.

"And where may be the present resting-place, and what is the actual occupation, of this interesting individual, Colonel Quince?"

"To tell the truth," said Gerty, "he is on his way here."

"By jove!" cried Richard, springing up. "I should not be a bit surprised if he were the unique individual with whom we came over in the boat to-day. His face struck me dimly as being familiar. He talked Boulevard French, with a British accent, exhibited a diamond ring (perhaps it was one of yours, Gerty), and——forgive me, mother! you must admit that your brother is a remarkable specimen, and has to be classified somehow," wound up the young man, pausing in his excited description as he caught sight of his gentle stepmother's grieved face.

"I cannot bear to think of him all alone in this big, wicked place, and I, his sister, with a home to offer him," began Mrs. Dallas: when she was cut short by an imperious ring at the bell.

"Enter our long-lost!" exclaimed Dick. But his stepmother rose, trembling.

The door was thrown open by the maid: when, faultlessly dressed, benign and calmly smiling, in walked Ralph Mercer.

"My own darling, *darling* brother!" And Mrs. Dallas fell into the reprobate's arms, with all the fervour of affection bestowed by women since the world began upon the scapegrace and the spendthrift.

Ralph was equal to the occasion, and exhibited a fine air of emotion. Georgie, between curiosity and nervousness, was moved to tears; and the Princess Badoura arched her back. Otherwise, the display of emotion was limited.

"You will have something to eat? You will sleep here? No! You have dined, and prefer an hotel? Unkind! Georgie, push over that arm-chair for your uncle."

"Is this my youngest niece?" asked Ralph, seizing Georgie by a lanky arm, and proceeding to inspect her. "Too angular as yet, but she will run you close in a few years, Gertrude. And this is doubtless the young man, Dicky, whom I remember in petticoats and curls? As for you, Dallas, you are looking remarkably well. How goes the world with you? Always impecuniously?"

For once Mr. Dallas found no sarcastic retort. He looked supremely disgusted.

"I think that our generation—yours and mine, Dallas—was principally distinguished for robustness of constitution. You are very little altered, and, I flatter myself, so am I."

"Humph!"

"I am just what you remember me; incurably young; the best fellow in the world, but too confiding. There is no specimen of human depravity that has not come some time or other under my notice; and yet—would you believe it?—to your systematic villain, your thorough-going egotist, I am as clay in the hand of the potter."

"And is it to some potter of that description that we are indebted for your presence in Paris, sir!" enquired Richard, respectfully.

Ralph waved his hand; sweeping away the epigram as beneath his

notice. "My views in coming to Paris are strictly domestic. I am, in fact, thinking of getting married."

"*Married!*" The word was repeated by everybody in chorus, with a great variety of intonation.

"Is she young?"

"Is she nice, darling?"

"Has she any money?"

"Is she lately escaped from Bedlam?" This last question, uttered sotto voce, came from Mr. Dallas.

But Ralph was impenetrable, so they had to give up questioning him; and Mrs. Dallas proceeded to pour a stream of mild gossip into his ear.

"Your old flame, Mary Hatherley, now Walter Russell's widow, was here just now. I never spoke to her about you, for I really felt I could not, after your having been so shamefully treated."

"Ah!" Ralph half closed his eyes. "What is she doing here?"

"I hardly know ——"

"But I do," interposed Georgie, triumphantly. "Dolly Hatherley told me this morning she was quite sure that the only thing which brought her was the idea of extracting money out of poor Miss Freake."

"And unfortunately," remarked Gertrude quietly, speaking for the first time, "Miss Freake is dead."

"Dead? Martha Freake dead!"

"Dear Ralph!" said Mrs. Dallas, affectionately. "You have not seen any of these people for twenty-five years and more, and yet your kind heart, I see, makes you feel for them still."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DISAPPOINTED.

MARK and Winifred met with an emotion that was all the stronger for being suppressed on both sides. The girl, indeed, felt her heart sink within her, as she lifted her eyes to the young man's grave, sad glance, for while she had never felt so keenly that Mark's love would be all in all to her, also never had it seemed more evident that his love must be numbered among the things of the past. He held her hand indeed, and looked long into her eyes; but his manner was so calm, his tone so quiet, his whole air so absorbed, that she dared not think of herself as occupying any place in his thoughts.

Mary Russell was as good as her word, and showed no intention whatever of quitting the field. What her motive could be in remaining, Winifred found it difficult to guess. Dolly's idea, that she suspected Miss Freake of having had money seemed, at first sight, too preposterous for acceptance; nevertheless, as the days went on, several

small signs appeared almost to confirm it. For one thing, Mary rarely left Mark and Winifred alone: never if she could help it.

Martha had hardly been carried to her last resting-place, when Winifred received a letter from Mrs. Burton which, with much semblance of sweet persuasion, in reality commanded her to come home. She really did not feel as if she had any valid excuse for resisting. Such work as she still had on hand could be finished at Elmsleigh, while Dolly's lessons were ceasing owing to the dispersion for the summer, of her pupils. Winifred, feeling listless through the reaction of the late emotion, was almost glad to have her course made out for her. For the summer and autumn months she could return to Elmsleigh; and afterwards ——? well, afterwards, something would present itself. She bent her face upon her hands and the bitter waters of loneliness closed over her soul.

That same evening when Mark, who had come in rather contrary to his custom, announced his intention of soon leaving Paris, she stated her resolution.

"You can make mamma's mind easy by assuring her that I, at any rate, shall soon be in Elmsleigh. About Dolly, I am not so sure. The Dallases have invited her, and she seems unable to tear herself away from —— shall we say Georgie, Dolly?"

"You can say Georgie if you like," replied Miss Dolly.

"And what about Miss Freake's affairs?" suddenly interposed Mary, her harsh voice harsher than usual. Even Mark turned and looked at her in surprise.

"You must know quite well that if by 'affairs' you mean money, the poor creature had nothing but the miserable annuity on which she lived here, Heaven knows how, until Miss Power came to her aid, and which went (its principal, I mean) on her death to some distant cousin in Australia."

It was Mark who thus answered, with some impatience.

Mary shook her head. "You don't deceive *me*."

"Indeed? Then perhaps you will kindly explain yourself."

Her face darkened at the cold scorn of his tone, and both her own voice and her hands began to tremble with anger as she retorted: "Explanations should come from you. How is it that, since my cousin's death, none of her boxes have been opened, none of her drawers examined, nor her papers read?"

"Aunt Mary! what do you expect us to find there? What could the poor thing leave, beyond mute and simple records of the poverty that she endured so nobly, and mementos of an existence that those who knew her longest should least wish to have recalled?" exclaimed Winifred, indignantly.

Mary Russell made no answer, only looked at her with an expression that stung Mark into a reproof.

"And if she had left millions, Aunt Mary, what claim upon them could be yours?" he asked.

"A——h!" The long cry broke from her, so charged with unholy rage that it startled her three listeners as they had been rarely startled in their lives. "What claims? More, perhaps, than your scandalous laws, if you invoke them, may allow; but a claim, nevertheless, of which the acknowledgment through very shame shall be extorted from you inch by inch and shilling by shilling, until it is counted out. Do you suppose that now when, after years of poverty and disappointment, the unutterable baseness of your father and my brother has been revealed to me, I can still keep so much faith in human nature as to accept the miserable pittance with which you seek to put me off? Do you think that ——"

"Enough!" interrupted Mark, and the sternness of his voice and manner silenced even Mary's fury. "To-morrow such testimony as the dead woman's papers can afford shall be submitted to your scrutiny."

"I shall have a person to meet you who knows more than you think," exclaimed Mrs. Russell.

"You may have the Court of Chancery if you can get it," responded Mark, as he took his leave.

"What a scene!" exclaimed Dolly, in high excitement, when Mrs. Russell had swept away to her room. "You look as if you had seen a ghost, Winifred. Now *I* feel rather pleased to think that when our amiable aunt's card-castle topples down, as it infallibly must to-morrow, she will be so enraged as not to be able any longer to bear the sight of us. And then she will go, which will be a relief. And had I not better write to Rich—to Mr. Dallas—to be present? The more clear heads we have on our side the better."

"That is a transparent device for getting Richard here," said Winifred, lifting Dolly's chin with her finger, and looking laughingly down on her pretty face. "But write by all means."

Dolly did not fail to write, nor Richard to come on the morrow. He was accompanied by Gertrude.

"As I hear that Mark is to be called to account for his treatment of the Hatherleys in general, and as I am now one of them, I thought I had better assist at the scene," she remarked to Winifred.

"Mark makes you an allowance, then?"

"That is to say, after his father's death, and as soon as affairs had been investigated, with what disastrous results we know, he wrote to Mrs. Hatherley and Mrs. Russell informing them how much (or, as they think, I fancy, how little) he could do for them. And on his arrival here the other day he addressed a similar note to myself."

"Poor Hatherley!" exclaimed Richard. "I should like to know how many men would hamper themselves with the debts of a prodigal father, and the maintenance of half a dozen relatives, mostly of the parasitic order!"

"I wonder that under the circumstances he gave himself so much trouble to find you, Lady Hatherley," remarked Dolly, with the

admirable air of unconscious childishness under cover of which she shot most of her barbed shafts. And Winifred, being human after all could scarcely refrain from an approving smile. What were all these people that they should dare to think Mark had done too little for them? If generosity were beyond them, could they not at least be grateful?

Gertrude had apparently not heeded Dolly's observation: at any rate, she did not answer it, and all general conversation was presently put a stop to by the entrance of Mrs. Russell. She was one of the people who act as a wet blanket always, and on this occasion her flushed, sullen face and ungracious manner were even less inviting than usual. She took her seat in silence; folded her hands and waited—grim as Destiny. She was still a striking looking woman, on a massive scale, and although her countenance was unpleasant, it had all the stateliness of outline that distinguished her handsome race. Winifred, watching her with a kind of fascination, fell to musing on the Hatherleys and their strange, sometimes strong—sometimes fell—characteristics. How much more deeply marked than most people's was their individuality! Mary and her brother had turned the ugly side of the family qualities outermost; for in them craft had taken the place of judgment, selfishness of calm endurance, obstinacy of courage. Nevertheless, they presented contrasts that made them worth studying.

Even Mark and Dolly were true Hatherleys, though they wore their type "with a difference." Mark had the noblest qualities of his noblest ancestor, and yet there was just the danger, as Winifred sorrowfully felt, that he might harden under poverty into too bitter a pride. Something—perhaps the sweetness and gentleness of his long-dead mother—had set a well of tenderness in the depths of his reserved nature: would this also be poisoned? Alas! there was no saying.

As for Dolly, her sturdy intrepidity came from the paternal stock; while the winsome beauty that she had inherited from her mother, who once had been beautiful, carried her triumphantly through every minor trouble of life.

The next to enter was Mark. He glanced round the room, then said carelessly and coldly: "I see we are not complete. But a gentleman followed me upstairs, who is, I presume, Mrs. Russell's adviser."

"No!" exclaimed Dolly and Richard simultaneously, as a portly figure darkened the door; and Dick added: "This is Mr. Mercer, Winifred; come doubtless to pay his respects to you; but the moment is not happily chosen."

"Mr. Mercer has come at my request, and is my friend," interposed Mary Russell. "He is the one person in the world whom my affairs still interest; and, most fortunately for me, he is the one person best qualified to defend them."

"Miss Power must kindly excuse my intrusion," said Ralph, bowing and speaking with an airy equanimity singularly contrasted to Mary's tragic voice. "And this is Mr. Mark Hatherley? I had, shall I say, the *honour* of knowing your father?"

"You may say it if you choose," answered Mark, with a dangerous look.

"Ahem!" The airiness this time was slightly more artificial, for Ralph had some perception, and Mark's manner had not encouraged him. "We had better, I suppose, proceed at once to business. Miss Power, will you lead the way to the bed-room of the late lamented lady?"

Mary Russell, without a shadow of embarrassment, produced the key of the door from her pocket. She had laid hands upon it the previous evening "for fear of midnight visits"; and it was she who now opened the room where Martha had died.

"If you wish to save time you will begin with that old black box," said Winifred, coldly addressing Ralph, without looking at him. "You can search elsewhere afterwards if you are not satisfied, but I know that Miss Freake kept her papers there."

Ralph, turning rather red at her tone, went down upon his knees in front of the box, and tumbled its contents out upon the floor. They were mostly shabby trifles, pathetic in their very shabbiness, because of the poverty of possessions, of aspirations and memories that had made them worth the hoarding. One packet of papers after another was eagerly untied, examined and hastily thrown aside. At last an exclamation of triumph suddenly broke from Ralph.

"Here, if I am not greatly mistaken, is something worth reading." He held up a letter for inspection. "This is in your father's handwriting. Shall I be permitted to read it aloud?" Mark gave no sign of dissent, so Ralph unfolded the paper and began:—

"'My Dear Martha,—You have chosen to withdraw yourself beyond the reach of your relatives, and to wrap yourself in an impenetrable silence. A feeling of bitterness, which I have some reluctance to believe can include myself, doubtless explains your resolution.

"But I know how to excuse, and how to forgive, and I have not forgotten the sympathy you showed me in old days when I had nobody but yourself to confide in. I am aware, too, through a curious accident, that you rendered my father some secret service for which he was very grateful; doubtless he would have rewarded you had his sudden death not prevented him from adding any codicil to his will. I confess to some curiosity to know what this secret service was. You can understand that, did I know its exact nature and extent, I might rate it even higher than he did, and be in proportion more willing to mark my sense of it in a permanent and substantial way. In a word, I am willing to pay you a fixed income, and if you will add to my old obligations towards you, as friend and

confidant, by enlightening me as to the cause of my father's gratitude, I may very likely increase that income by a considerable sum.

'Yours faithfully,

'JOHN HATHERLEY.

'P.S.—£10,000 once, as I know, invested by my father in the Pocahontas Railway, cannot be accounted for. Can you throw any light on the matter?'"

"*I* might," said Ralph, laying down the letter, and producing a small portfolio from his breast-pocket. "I have searched long without finding anything so good for my purpose as that letter. That I should have chanced upon it is a fact that I regard as a direct interposition of Providence in favour of the injured and despoiled. What I have now to ask you all to listen to is the answer."

"And that if you please, *I* will read aloud," suddenly broke in Gertrude; and, before he could even guess her intention, she had snatched a letter from his hand: "This," she said, "was written by Miss Freake:—

"'Morally, I have not yet sunk so low, my cousin, that I could accept the means of livelihood from the hand that has stricken me. To do so would be to condone the baseness and confirm the lie that have blasted my name and my life. I trust that I may misjudge you; but, half-mad though I am, I am bewildered. There are many things I cannot understand; but I think that the reason why you betrayed me was that—little as you had really told me—you still told me too much. And perhaps there was method in your cruelty. Secrets I can keep; but wrongs I have yet to learn to condone. For the rest, be certain that you will never learn the truth regarding the £10,000 from me. The sum is in safe keeping, and will eventually return to a Hatherley. Leave me to my poverty; and when you hear that I am dead, do not, even if you can, feel remorseful; for no boon that can henceforth be bestowed on me will be as welcome as the silence and peace of the grave. MARTHA FREAKE.'"

Gertrude's voice deepened as she read these mournful concluding words; and the silence which succeeded to them was caused by an emotion more or less profound.

Lady Hatherley herself was the first again to speak. "You will wonder," she said, addressing Mark, "why I should have interfered to read out this letter. The truth is, it was through me, I regretfully own, that Uncle Mercer became possessed of it. I entered The Limes, although Richard did not know it, as an adventuress. He," pointing to Ralph "had assured me that there was some secret in your family which, if once discovered, would be the source to himself and his accomplices of perpetual wealth. I have long learnt to believe that he was utterly misled, if not as to the existence

of this secret, at any rate as to its importance. But he seemed to think that the proof of it would give him some kind of hold over Sir John. For the rest, as to the exact nature of the secret he was never explicit. One time it seemed to me to have something to do with a will: another time, with a marriage. I was to spy and listen; observe and draw conclusions. If possible, I was to discover a secret drawer and to find, and forward to him, certain old letters from America, having relation to a family of Hatherleys there. I accepted the mission, not so much—although nobody will perhaps believe me—with any idea of ultimate gain to myself, as because I liked the flavour of an intrigue. Time went on, and I married Sir John. I watched my husband at the bureau, and at last hit upon what I believed to be the secret of the drawer. I went down one night to experiment, and you, Mark, know the result. Mrs. Hatherley followed, watched me, and finally sprang upon me just as I had discovered the receipt for the Psalter. But what she had not seen and could not know was that I had found and taken possession of Miss Freake's letter. For Mr. Mercer's purpose there was nothing else of any importance in the drawer. It was full principally of unpaid bills and threatening letters from creditors. This is all I have to say: and I know," wound up Gertrude, in her reckless way, "that in now saying it and betraying my confederate, I am playing just as sorry a part as previously in aiding and abetting him. But at least this scene, and the unjust attack of which you, Mark, are the object, give me the opportunity of expressing—not my remorse, for that is of little use—but my sense of your goodness and generosity, with my determination to earn my own bread by any honest means, and at any cost, rather than add by a feather's weight to your many burdens."

"Bravo, Gerty!" cried Dolly, and jumping up, embraced her.

The movement was a real inspiration; for it relieved the tension of everybody's nerves, and served to bring them back to the commonplace.

"And I am sure," resumed Dolly, looking round, her arm still on Lady Hatherley's shoulder, "that *I* shall never take a shilling from you, Mark: so there are two off you."

"Are you then so enchanted with teaching that you intend to continue it indefinitely?" asked Mark, with his kindly smile.

"So she says. But she is first herself to be taught obedience, which is the first duty of a wife," interrupted Richard, and Dolly flashed on the circle a radiant glance of bliss.

"How much longer do you intend this farce to continue?" suddenly broke in Mary's discordant tones, as she turned furiously on the discomfited Ralph. That gentleman's plight was indeed pitiable. The effect which he had prepared with so much care had been turned from its proper course by Gertrude and sprung like a mine beneath his feet. His courage, always factitious, was fast evaporating; but Mrs. Russell's glance brought it back. With a swagger, he thrust

his hand into the breast of his coat, and took up the thread of his story.

"You have not yet done with me, Mr. Hatherley ——"

"No, indeed, I have not," interrupted Mark, with slighting contempt. "Perhaps you will be so good as to state what object, other than the inadmissible one of self-exposure, brought you here to-day?"

"Softly, if you please," answered Ralph, insolently, although he quailed beneath the young man's glance. "You will have to come down a note or two, sir. Grant that my object is not very clear. When one has to try and square accounts with an arch-deceiver such as your father, everything is dark at first. To start with at all, I had to construct a theory, which briefly is this: Miss Freake rendered your grandfather a service, and was very probably paid for it. I make no account of the apparent contradiction to this in your father's offer to reward her: for he was evidently only feeling his way. On the other hand, Miss Freake lived in Paris, the most expensive capital in Europe, for many years, ostensibly on nothing ——"

"She lived, if semi-starvation can be called living, on £40 a-year, supplemented by a few miserable earnings," interrupted Winifred.

"I don't believe it," answered Ralph, and his manner made Mark's eyes flash. "It is far more conceivable that she enjoyed a portion, and laid by the rest, of an income made over to her on the understanding that it was to revert at her death to one of the Hatherley family. The passage about the £10,000 in his letter carries out this theory, and my belief is that she bequeathed the principal and all her savings to her trusty and well-beloved cousin, Mr. Mark Hatherley."

A silence of a few moments ensued, caused probably by sheer surprise on the part of the majority at this fantastic conclusion.

"Rather a weak-legged theory after all, Uncle Ralph. I should have thought a person of your experience might have invented something better," observed Richard, at last, with mocking politeness.

Ralph changed colour and bit his lip, turning at the same time a wavering glance on Mary Russell. Evidently the blank amazement with which his hypothesis had been received disconcerted him considerably. The truth was, that Martha's death had upset all his own and Mary's calculations. They had hoped to wring from her some confession in regard to the money; and next to induce her to leave, at least, a portion of it to Mary. This project frustrated, Ralph himself had been but little inclined to do anything more; but Mary's baffled rage could not admit the possibility of total defeat, and she had clung to the conviction that Martha must have left hidden away a will, or other proof of property, or perhaps a hoard of money. Chance having, at last, fully revealed to Ralph the fraud by which John became possessed of all his father's wealth, Mary's anger had risen to frenzy. "Something must—*should* be done to right her," she said

and re-said. This dream, since they entered Martha's bed-room, had been growing every moment dimmer. No will had been found, and no money either. The obvious sincerity of Mark's amazement at the mention of the £10,000 had carried conviction to Ralph Mercer. The man was discouraged—cooled—a trifle ashamed. Moreover, the afternoon was wearing on, and he felt hungry.

He had meant to startle Mark by informing him of his father's full baseness: but now it struck him that this precious piece of information would be appropriately reserved for another occasion. Advancing a step or two, he held out his hand to the petrified Mark and said impressively: "Forgive me!"

"Are you mad?" shrieked Mary, while her nephew retreated several paces and looked at Mr. Mercer's extended hand with an air of the frankest aversion.

"Mad?" echoed Ralph mournfully, and struck an attitude worthy of Chatham. "No, Mary, my long lost love, my late-found friend, not mad; though Fate has indeed done its worst to make me so! My reason," continued Mr. Mercer, almost hysterically, "is unaffected, but my heart is wrung at the sense of the cruel part which principle on the one hand, the irony of chance on the other, have condemned me to play. I am an outcast, a wanderer, a cumberer of the soil—I know it, feel it, admit it. But every chivalrous instinct—my only heritage from a long line of ancestors—is not so dead within me as to leave me incapable of repentance. I have wronged Mr. Hatherley: I beg his pardon. He will not accept my excuses. I regret it, but resign myself to be misjudged. I feel that my place is no longer in this house; good breeding bids me leave it, and I follow the dictates of a gentleman's strongest sentiment."

He bowed like Sir Charles Grandison; caught up his hat with suspicious swiftness; turned on his heel, and decamped: Mary staring after him with an expression of stony fury, to which the countenance of Medusa must have been a trifle.

A pause; and then a shout of light laughter came from Richard. Mrs. Russell turned slowly round and fixed on the irreverent Dick a glance so gruesome that it ought to have frozen every drop of blood within his veins. But unfortunately it only had the effect of sending him off into fresh and louder peals of merriment. Mary turned purple; glared; actually raised her hand as if to strike him. Dick, however, had reached that stage in which he could hardly have stopped laughing had he wished: and he did not wish. And Mary, after one long, outraged stare at his impiety, precipitated herself across the room like a stone from a catapult, dashed along the little antechamber, and vanished.

(To be concluded.)

A CURIOUS EXPERIENCE.

WHAT I am about to tell of took place during the last year of John Whitney's life, now many years ago. We could never account for it, or understand it: but it occurred (at least, so far as our experience of it went) just as I relate it.

It was not the custom for schools to give a long holiday at Easter then: one week at most. Dr. Frost allowed us from the Thursday in Passion week, to the following Thursday; and many of the boys spent it at school.

Easter was late that year, and the weather lovely. On the Wednesday in Easter week, the Squire and Mrs. Todhetley drove over to spend the day at Whitney Hall, Tod and I being with them. Sir John and Lady Whitney were beginning to be anxious about John's health—their eldest son. He had been ailing since the previous Christmas, and he seemed to get thinner and weaker. It was so perceptible when he got home from school this Easter, that Sir John put himself into a flurry (he was just like the Squire in that and in many another way), and sent an express to Worcester for Henry Carden, asking him to bring Dr. Hastings with him. They came. John wanted care, they said, and they could not discover any specific disease at present. As to his returning to school, they both thought that question might be left with the boy himself. John told them he should prefer to go back, and laughed a little at this fuss being made over him: he should soon be all right, he said; people were apt to lose strength more or less in the spring. He was sixteen then, a slender, upright boy, with a delicate, thoughtful face, dreamy, grey-blue eyes and brown hair, and he was ever gentle, sweet-tempered, and considerate. Sir John related to the Squire what the doctors had said, avowing that he could not "make much out of it."

In the afternoon, when we were out of doors on the lawn in the hot sunshine, listening to the birds singing and the cuckoo calling, Featherston came in, the local doctor, who saw John nearly every day. He was a tall, grey, hard-worked man, with a face of care. After talking a few moments with John and his mother, he turned to the rest of us on the grass. The Squire and Sir John were sitting on a garden bench, some wine and lemonade on a little table between them. Featherston shook hands.

"Will you take some?" asked Sir John.

"I don't mind a glass of lemonade with a dash of sherry in it," answered Featherston, lifting his hat to rub his brow. "I have been walking beyond Goose Brook and back, and upon my word it is as hot as midsummer."

"Ay, 'tis," assented Sir John. "Help yourself, doctor."

He filled a tumbler with what he wanted, brought it over to the opposite bench, and sat down by Mrs. Todhetley. John and his mother were at the other end of it; I sat on the arm. The rest of them, with Helen and Anna, had gone strolling away; to the North Pole, for all we knew.

"John still says he shall go back to school," began Lady Whitney, to Featherston.

"Ay; to-morrow's the day, isn't it, John? Black Thursday, some of you boys call it."

"I like school," said John.

"Almost a pity, though," continued Featherston, looking up and about him. "To be out at will all day in this soft air, under the blue skies and the healing sunbeams, might be of more benefit to you, Master John, than being cooped up in a close schoolroom."

"You hear, John!" cried Lady Whitney. "I wish you would persuade him to take a longer rest at home, Mr. Featherston!"

Mr. Featherston stooped for his tumbler, which he had lodged on the smooth grass, and took another drink at it before replying. "If you and John would follow my advice, Lady Whitney, I'd give it."

"Yes?" cried she, all eagerness.

"Take John somewhere for a fortnight, and let him go back to school at the end," said the surgeon. "That would do him good."

"Why of course it would," called out Sir John, who had been listening. "And I say it shall be done. John, my boy, you and your mother shall go to the seaside—to Aberystwith."

"Well, I don't think I should quite say that, Sir John," said Featherston again. "The seaside would be all very well in this warm weather; but it may not last, it may change to cold and frost. I should suggest one of the inland watering-places, as they are called: where there's a Spa, and a Pump Room, and a Parade, and lots of gay company. It would be lively for him, and a thorough change."

"What a nice idea!" cried Lady Whitney, who was the most unsophisticated woman in the world. "Such as Pumpwater."

"Such as Pumpwater: the very place," agreed Featherston. "Well, were I you, my lady, I would try it for a couple of weeks. Let John take a companion with him; one of his schoolfellows. Here's Johnny Ludlow: he might do."

"I'd rather have Johnny Ludlow than anybody," said John.

Remarking that his time was up, for a patient waited for him, and that he must leave us to settle the question, Featherston took his departure. But it appeared to be settled already.

"Johnny can go," spoke up the Squire. "The loss of a fortnight's lessons is not much, compared with doing a little service to a friend. Charming spots are those inland watering-places, and Pumpwater is about the best of them all."

"We must get lodgings," said Lady Whitney presently, when they

had done expatiating upon the gauds and glories of Pumpwater. "To stay at an hotel would be so noisy; and expensive besides."

"I know of some," cried Mrs. Todhetley, in sudden thought. "If you could get into Miss Gay's rooms, you would be well off. Do you remember them?"—turning to the Squire. "We stayed at her house on our way from ——"

"Why, bless me, to be sure I do," he interrupted. "Somebody had given us Miss Gay's address, and we drove straight to it to see if she had rooms at liberty; she had, and took us in at once. We were so comfortable there that we stayed at Pumpwater three days instead of two."

It was hastily decided that Mrs. Todhetley should write to Miss Gay, and she went indoors to do so. All being well, Lady Whitney meant to start on Saturday.

Miss Gay's answer came punctually, reaching Whitney Hall on Friday morning. It was addressed to Mrs. Todhetley, but Lady Whitney, as had been arranged, opened it. Miss Gay wrote that she should be much pleased to receive Lady Whitney. Her house, as it chanced, was then quite empty; a family, who had been with her six weeks, had just left: so Lady Whitney might take her choice of the rooms, which she would keep vacant until Saturday. In conclusion, she begged Mrs. Todhetley to notice that her address was changed. The old house was too small to accommodate the many kind friends who patronised her, and she had moved into a larger house, superior to the other and in the best position.

Thus all things seemed to move smoothly for our expedition; and we departed by train on the Saturday morning for Pumpwater.

It was a handsome house, standing in the high road, between the parade and the principal street, and rather different from the houses on each side it, inasmuch as that it was detached and had a narrow slip of gravelled ground in front. In fact, it looked too large and handsome for a lodging-house; and Lady Whitney, regarding it from the fly which had brought us from the station, wondered whether the driver had made a mistake. It was built of red-brick, with ornamental white stone facings; the door, set in a pillared portico, stood in the middle, and three rooms, each with a bay window, lay one above another on both sides.

But in a moment we saw it was all right. A slight, fair woman, in a slate silk gown, came running out and announced herself as Miss Gay. She had a mild, pleasant voice, and a mild, pleasant face, with light falling curls, the fashion then for everybody, and she wore a lace cap, trimmed with pink. I took to her and to her face at once.

"I am glad to be here," said Lady Whitney, cordially, in answer to Miss Gay's welcome. "Is there anyone who can help with the luggage? We have not brought either man or maid-servant."

"Oh dear yes, my lady. Please let me show you indoors, and

then leave all to me. Susannah!—Oh, here you are, Susannah! Where's Charity?—my cousin and chief help-mate, my lady."

A tall, dark person, about Miss Gay's own age, which might be forty, wearing brown ribbon in her hair and a purple bow at her throat, dropped a curtsey to Lady Whitney. This was Susannah. She looked strong-minded and capable. Charity, who came running up the kitchen stairs, was a smiling young woman-servant, with a coarse apron tied round her, and red arms bared to the elbow.

There were four sitting-rooms on the ground floor: two in front, with their large bay windows; two at the back, looking out upon some bright, semi-public gardens.

"A delightful house!" exclaimed Lady Whitney to Miss Gay, after she had looked about a little. "I will take one of these front rooms for our sitting-room," she added, entering, haphazard, the one on the right of the entrance-hall, and putting down her bag and parasol. "This one, I think, Miss Gay."

"Very good, my lady. And will you now be pleased to walk up-stairs and fix upon the bedrooms."

Lady Whitney seemed to fancy the front of the house. "This room shall be my son's; and I should like to have the opposite one for myself," she said, rather hesitatingly, knowing they must be the two best chambers of all. "Can I, Miss Gay?"

Miss Gay seemed quite willing. We were in the room over our sitting-room on the right of the house looking to the front. The objection, if it could be called one, came from Susannah.

"You can have the other room, certainly, my lady; but I think the young gentleman would find this one noisy, with all the carriages and carts that pass by, night and morning. The back rooms are much more quiet."

"But I like noise," put in John; "it seems like company to me. If I could do as I would, I'd never sleep in the country."

"One of the back rooms is very lively, sir; it has a view of the turning to the Pump Room," persisted Susannah, a kind of suppressed eagerness in her tone; and it struck me that she did not want John to have this front chamber. "I think you would like it best."

"No," said John, turning round from the window, out of which he had been looking, "I will have this. I shall like to watch the shops down that turning opposite, and the people who go into them."

No more was said. John took this chamber, which was over our sitting-room, Lady Whitney had the other front chamber, and I had a very good one at the back of John's. And thus we settled down.

Pumpwater is a nice place, as you would know if I gave its proper name, bright and gay, and our house was in the best of situations. The principal street, with its handsome shops, lay to our right; the Parade, leading to the Spa and Pump Room, to our left, and company and carriages were continually passing by. We visited some of the shops and took a look at the Pump Room.

In the evening, when tea was over, Miss Gay came in to speak of the breakfast. Lady Whitney asked her to sit down for a little chat. She wanted to ask about the churches.

"What a very nice house this is!" again observed Lady Whitney presently: for the more she saw of it, the better she found it. "You must pay a high rent for it, Miss Gay."

"Not so high as your ladyship might think," was the answer; "not high at all for what it is. I paid sixty pounds for the little house I used to be in, and I pay only seventy for this."

"Only seventy!" echoed Lady Whitney, in surprise. "How is it you get it so cheaply?"

A waggonette, full of people, was passing just then; Miss Gay seemed to want to watch it by before she answered. We were sitting in the dusk with the blinds up.

"For one thing, it had been standing empty for some time, and I suppose Mr. Bone, the agent, was glad to have my offer," replied Miss Gay, who seemed to be as fond of talking as anybody else is, once set on. "It had belonged to a good old family, my lady, but they got embarrassed and put it up for sale some six or seven years ago. A Mr. Calson bought it. He had come to Pumpwater about that time from foreign lands; and he and his wife settled down in the house. A puny, weakly little woman she was, who seemed to get weaklier instead of stronger, and in a year or two she died. After her death her husband got ill; he went away for change of air, and died in London; and the house was left to a little nephew living over in Australia."

"And has the house been vacant ever since?" asked John.

"No, sir. At first it was let furnished, then unfurnished. But it had been vacant some little time when I applied to Mr. Bone. I conclude he thought it better to let it at a low rent than for it to stand empty."

"It must cost you incessant care and trouble, Miss Gay, to conduct a house like this—when you are full," remarked Lady Whitney.

"It does," she answered. "One's work seems never done—and I cannot, at that, give satisfaction to all. Ah, my lady, what a difference there is in people!—you would never think it. Some are so kind and considerate to me, so anxious not to give trouble unduly, and so satisfied with all I do that it is a pleasure to serve them: while others make gratuitous work and trouble from morning till night, and treat me as if I were just a dog under their feet. Of course when we are full I have another servant in, two sometimes."

"Even that must leave a great deal for yourself to do and see to."

"The back is always fitted to the burden," sighed Miss Gay. "My father was a farmer in this county, as his ancestors had been before him, farming his three hundred acres of land, and looked upon as a man of substance. My mother made the butter, saw to the poultry,

and superintended generally her household: and we children helped her. Farmers' daughters then did not spend their days in playing the piano and doing fancy work, or expect to be waited upon like ladies born."

"They do now, though," said Lady Whitney.

"So I was ready to turn my hand to anything when hard times came—not that I had thought I should have to do it," continued Miss Gay. "But my father's means dwindled down. Prosperity gave way to adversity. Crops failed; the stock died off; two of my brothers fell into trouble and it cost a mint of money to extricate them. Altogether, when father died, but little of his savings remained to us. Mother took a house in the town here, to let lodgings, and I came with her. She is dead, my lady, and I am left."

The silent tears were running down poor Miss Gay's cheeks.

"It is a life of struggle, I am sure," spoke Lady Whitney, gently. "And not deserved, Miss Gay."

"But there's another life to come," spoke John, in a half whisper, turning to Miss Gay from his favourite ground, the large bay-window. "None of us will be overworked *there*."

Miss Gay stealthily wiped her cheeks. "I do not repine," she said, humbly. "I have been enabled to rub on and keep my head above water, and to provide little comforts for mother in her need; and I gratefully thank God for it."

The bells of the churches, ringing out at eight o'clock, called us up in the morning. Lady Whitney was downstairs first, I next. Susannah, who waited upon us, had brought up the breakfast. John followed me in.

"I hope you have slept well, my boy," said Lady Whitney, kissing him. "I have."

"So have I," I put in.

"Then you and the mother make up for me, Johnny," he said; "for I have not slept at all."

"Oh John!" exclaimed his mother.

"Not a wink all night long," added John. "I can't think what was the matter with me."

Susannah, then stooping to get the sugar-basin out of the side-board, rose, turned sharply round and fixed her eyes on John. So curious an expression was on her face that I could but notice it.

"Do you not think it was the noise, sir?" she said to him. "I knew that room would be too noisy for you."

"Why the room was as quiet as could be," he answered. "A few carriages rolled by last night—and I liked to hear them; but that was all over before midnight; and I have heard none this morning."

"Well, sir, I'm sure you would be more comfortable in a back room," contended Susannah.

"It was a strange bed," said John. "I shall sleep all the sounder to-night."

Breakfast was half over when John found he had left his watch upstairs, on the chest of drawers. I went to fetch it.

The chamber door was open, and I stepped to the drawers, which stood just inside. Miss Gay and Susannah were making the bed and talking, too busy to see or hear me. A lot of things lay on the white cloth, and at first I could not see the watch.

"He declares he has not slept at all; *not at all*," Susannah was saying with emphasis. "If you had only seconded me yesterday, Harriet, they need not have had this room. But you never made a word of objection; you gave in at once."

"Well, I saw no cause to make it," said Miss Gay, mildly. "If I were to give in to your fancies, Susannah, I might as well shut up the room. Visitors must get used to it."

The watch had been partly hidden under one of John's neck-ties. I caught it up and decamped.

We went to church after breakfast. The first hymn sung was that nice one beginning, "Brief life."

> "Brief life is here our portion;
> Brief sorrow, short-lived care;
> The life that knows no ending,
> The tearless life is *there*."

As the verses went on, John touched my elbow: "Miss Gay," he whispered; his eyelashes moist with the melody of the music. I have often thought since that we might have seen by these very moods of John—his thoughts bent upon Heaven more than upon earth—that his life was swiftly passing.

There's not much to tell of that Sunday. We dined in the middle of the day; John fell asleep after dinner; and in the evening we attended church again. And I think everybody was ready for bed when bedtime came. I know I was.

Therefore it was all the more surprising when, the next morning, John said he had again not slept.

"What, not at all!" exclaimed his mother.

"No, not at all. As I went to bed, so I got up—sleepless."

"I never heard of such a thing!" cried Lady Whitney. "Perhaps, John, you were too tired to sleep?"

"Something of that," he answered. "I felt both tired and sleepy when I got into bed; particularly so. But I got no sleep: not a wink. I could not lie still, either; I was frightfully restless all night; just as I was the night before. I suppose it can't be the bed?"

"Is the bed not comfortable?" asked his mother.

"It seems as comfortable a bed as can be when I first lie down in . And then I get restless and uneasy."

"It must be the restlessness of extreme fatigue," said Lady Whitney. "I fear the journey was rather too much for you, my dear."

"Oh I shall be all right as soon as I can sleep, mamma."

We had a surprise that morning. John and I were standing before a tart shop, our eyes glued to the window, when a voice behind us called out, "Don't they look nice, boys!" Turning round, there stood Henry Carden of Worcester, arm-in-arm with a little white-haired gentleman. Lady Whitney, in at the fishmonger's next door, came out while he was shaking hands with us.

"Dear me!—is it you?" she cried to Mr. Carden.

"Ay," said he in his pleasant manner, "here am I at Pumpwater! Come all this way to spend a couple of days with my old friend: Dr. Tambourine," added the surgeon, introducing him to Lady Whitney. Anyway, that was the name she understood him to say. John thought he said Tamarind, and I Carrafin. The street was noisy.

The Doctor seemed to be chatty and courteous, a gentleman of the old school. He said his wife should do herself the honour of calling upon Lady Whitney if agreeable; Lady Whitney replied that it would be. He and Mr. Carden, who would be starting for Worcester by train that afternoon, walked with us up the Parade to the Pump Room. How a chance meeting like this in a strange place makes one feel at home in it!

The name turned out to be Parafin. Mrs. Parafin called early in the afternoon, on her way to some entertainment at the Pump Room: a chatty, pleasant woman, younger than her husband. He had retired from practice, and they lived in a white villa outside the town.

And what with looking at the shops, and parading up and down the public walks, and the entertainment at the Pump Room, to which we went with Mrs. Parafin, and all the rest of it, we felt uncommonly sleepy when night came, and were beginning to regard Pumpwater as a sort of Eden.

"Johnny, have you slept?"

I was brushing my hair at the glass, under the morning sun, when John Whitney, half-dressed, and pale and languid, opened my door and thus accosted me.

"Yes; like a top. Why? Is anything the matter, John?"

"See here," said he, sinking into the easy-chair by the fire-place, "it is an odd thing, but I have again not slept. I *can't* sleep."

I put my back against the dressing-table and stood looking down at him, brush in hand. Not slept again! It *was* an odd thing.

"But what can be the cause, John?"

"I am beginning to think it must be the room."

"How can it be the room?"

"I don't know. There's nothing the matter with the room that I can see; it seems well-ventilated; the chimney's not stopped-up. Yet this is the third night that I cannot get to sleep in it."

"But *why* can you not get to sleep," I persisted.

"I say I don't know why. Each night I have been as sleepy as possible; last night I could hardly undress I was so sleepy; but no sooner am I in bed than sleep goes right away from me. Not only that: I get terribly restless."

Weighing the problem this way and that, an idea struck me.

"John, do you think it is nervousness?"

"How can it be? I never was nervous in my life."

"I mean this: Not sleeping the first night, you may have got nervous about it the second and third."

He shook his head. "I have been nothing of the kind, Johnny. But look here: I hardly see what I am to do. I cannot go on like this without sleep; yet, if I tell the mother again, she'll say the air of the place does not suit me and run away from it——"

"Suppose we change rooms to-night, John?" I interrupted. "I can't think but you would sleep here. If you do not, why it must be the air of Pumpwater, and the sooner you are out of it the better."

"You'd not mind changing rooms for one night?" he said, wistfully.

"Mind! Why I shall be the gainer. Yours is the best room of the two."

At that it was settled; nothing to be said to anybody about the bargain. We did not want to be kidnapped out of Pumpwater—and Lady Whitney had promised us a night at the theatre.

Two or three more acquaintances were made, or found out, that day. Old Lady Scott heard of us, and came to call on Lady Whitney; they used to be intimate. She introduced some people at the Pump Room. Altogether, it seemed that we should not lack society.

Night came; and John and I went upstairs together. He undressed in his own room, and I in mine; and then we made the exchange. I saw him into my bed and wished him a good-night.

"Good-night, Johnny," he answered. "I hope you will sleep."

"Little doubt of that, John. I always sleep when I have nothing to trouble me. A very good-night to *you*."

I had nothing to trouble me, and I was as sleepy as could be; and yet, I did not and could not sleep. I lay quiet as usual after getting into bed, yielding to the expected sleep, and I shut my eyes and never thought but it was coming.

Instead of that, came restlessness. A strange restlessness quite foreign to me, persistent and unaccountable. I tossed and turned from side to side, and I had not had a wink of sleep at morning light, nor any symptom of it. Was I getting nervous? Had I let the feeling creep over me that I had suggested to John? No; not that I was aware of. What could it be?

Unrefreshed and weary, I got up at the usual hour, and stole silently into the other room. John was in a deep sleep, his calm face lying still upon the pillow. Though I made no noise, my presence awoke him.

"Oh Johnny!" he exclaimed, "I have had *such* a night."

"Bad?"

"No; *good.* I went to sleep at once and never woke till now. It has done me a world of good. And you?"

"I? Oh well, I don't think I slept quite as well as I did here; it was a strange bed," I answered, carelessly.

The next night the same plan was carried out, he taking my bed; I his. And again John slept through it, while I *did not sleep at all.* I said nothing about it: John Whitney's comfort was of more importance than mine.

The third night came. This night we had been to the theatre, and had laughed ourselves hoarse, and been altogether delighted. No sooner was I in bed, and feeling dead asleep, than the door slowly opened and in came Lady Whitney, a candle in one hand, a wine-glass in the other.

"John, my dear," she began, "your tonic was forgotten this evening. I think you had better take it now. Featherston said, you know — Good gracious!" she broke off. "Why, it is Johnny!"

I could hardly speak for laughing, her face presented such a picture of astonishment. Sitting up in bed, I told her all; there was no help for it: that we had exchanged beds, John not having been able to sleep in this one.

"And do you sleep well in it?" she asked.

"No, not yet. But I feel very sleepy to-night, dear Lady Whitney."

"Well, you are a good lad, Johnny, to do this for him; and to say nothing about it," she concluded, as she went away with the candle and the tonic.

Dead asleep though I was, I could not get to sleep. It would be simply useless to try to describe my sensations. Each succeeding night they had been more marked. A strange, discomforting restlessness pervaded me; a feeling of uneasiness, I could not tell why or wherefore. I saw nothing uncanny, I heard nothing; nevertheless, I felt just as though some uncanny presence was in the room, imparting a sense of semi-terror. Once or twice, when I nearly dozed off from sheer weariness, I started up in real terror, wide awake again, my hair and face damp with a nameless fright.

I told this at breakfast, in answer to Lady Whitney's questions: John confessed that precisely the same sensations had attacked him the three nights he lay in the bed. Lady Whitney declared she never heard the like; and she kept looking at us alternately, as if doubting what could be the matter with us, or whether we had taken scarlet fever.

On this morning, Friday, a letter came from Sir John, saying that Featherston was coming to Pumpwater. Anxious on the score of his son, he was sending Featherston to see him, and take back a report. "I think he would stay a couple of days if you made it convenient

to entertain him, and it would be a little holiday for the poor hard-worked man," wrote Sir John, who was just as kind-hearted as his wife.

"To be sure I will," said Lady Whitney. "He shall have that room; I dare say he won't say he cannot sleep in it: it will be more comfortable for him than getting a bed at an hotel. Susannah shall put a small bed into the back room for Johnny. And when Featherston is gone, I will take the room myself. I am not like you two silly boys—afraid of lying awake."

Mr. Featherston arrived late that evening, with his grey face of care and his thin frame. He said he could hardly recal the time when he had had as much as two days' holiday, and thanked Lady Whitney for receiving him. That night John and I occupied the back room, having conducted Featherston in state to the front, with two candles; and both of us slept excellently well.

At breakfast Featherston began talking about the air. He had always believed Pumpwater to have a rather soporific air, but supposed he must be mistaken. Anyway, it had kept him awake; and it was not a little that did that for him.

"Did you not sleep well?" asked Lady Whitney.

"I did not sleep at all; did not get a wink of it all night long. Never mind, my lady," he added with a good-natured laugh, "I shall sleep all the sounder to-night."

But he did not. The next morning (Sunday) he looked grave and tired, and eat his breakfast almost in silence. When we had finished, he said he should like, with Lady Whitney's permission, to speak to the landlady. Miss Gay came in at once: in a light fresh print gown and black silk apron.

"Ma'am," began Featherston, politely, "something is wrong with that bedroom overhead. What is it?"

"Something wrong, sir?" repeated Miss Gay, her meek face flushing. "Wrong in what way, sir?"

"I don't know," answered Featherston; "I thought perhaps you could tell me: anyway, it ought to be seen to. It is something that scares away sleep. I give you my word, ma'am, I never had two such restless nights in succession in all my life. Two such *strange* nights. It was not only that sleep would not come near me; that's nothing uncommon you may say; but I lay in a state of uneasy, indescribable restlessness. I have examined the room again this morning, and I can see no cause to induce it, yet a cause there must undoubtedly be. The paper is not made of arsenic, I suppose?"

"The paper is pale pink, sir," observed Miss Gay. "I fancy it is the green papers that have arsenic in them."

"Ay; well. I think there must be poison behind the paper; in the paste, say," went on Featherston. "Or perhaps another paper underneath has arsenic in it?"

Miss Gay shook her head, as she stood with her hand on the back of a chair. Lady Whitney had invited her to sit, but she declined.

"When I came into the house six months ago, that room was re-papered, and I saw that the walls were thoroughly scraped. If you think there's anything—anything in the room that prevents people sleeping, and—and could point out what it is, I'm sure, sir, I should be glad to remedy it," said Miss Gay, with uncomfortable hesitation.

But this was just what Featherston, for all he was a doctor, could not point out. That something was amiss with the room, he felt convinced, but he had not discovered what it was, or how it could be remedied.

"After lying in torment half the night, I got up and lighted my candle," said he. "I examined the room and opened the window to let the cool breeze blow in. I could find nothing likely to keep me awake, no stuffed-up chimney, no accumulation of dust; and I shut the window and got into bed again. I was pretty cool by that time and reckoned I should sleep. Not a bit of it, ma'am. I lay more restless than ever, with the same unaccountable feeling of discomfort and depression upon me. Just as I had felt the night before."

"I am very sorry, sir," sighed Miss Gay, taking her hand from the chair to depart. "If the room is close, or anything of that ——"

"But it is not close, ma'am. I don't know what it is. And I'm sure I hope you will be able to find out, and get it remedied," concluded Featherston as she withdrew.

We then told him of our experience: John's and mine. It amazed him. "What an extraordinary thing!" he exclaimed. "One would think the room was haunted."

"Do you believe in haunted rooms, sir?" asked John.

"Well, I suppose such things are," he answered. "Folks say so. If haunted houses exist, why not haunted rooms?"

"It must lie in the Pumpwater air," said Lady Whitney, who was too practical to give in to haunted regions; "and I am very sorry you should have had your two nights' rest spoilt by it, Mr. Featherston. I will take the room myself: nothing keeps me awake."

"Did you ever see a ghost, sir?" asked John.

"No, never. But I know those who have seen them; and I cannot disbelieve what they say. One such story in particular is often in my mind; it was a very strange one."

"Won't you tell it us, Mr. Featherston?"

The doctor only laughed in answer. But after we came out of church, when he was sitting with me and John on the Parade, he told it. And I only wish I had space to relate it here.

He left Pumpwater in the afternoon, and Lady Whitney had the room prepared for her use at once, John moving into hers. So that I had mine to myself again, and the little bed was taken out of it.

The next day was Monday. When Lady Whitney came down in the morning the first thing she told us was, that she had not slept. All the curious symptoms of restless disturbance, of inward agitation, which we had experienced, had visited her.

"I will not give in, my dears," she said, bravely. "It may be, you know, that what I had heard against the room took all sleep out of me, though I was not conscious of it; so I shall keep to it. I must say it is a most comfortable bed."

She "kept" to the room until the Wednesday; three nights in all; getting no sleep. Then she gave in. Occasionally during the third night, when she was dropping asleep from exhaustion, she was startled up from it in sudden terror: terror of she knew not what. Just as it had been with me and with John. On the Wednesday morning she told Susannah that they must give her the back room opposite mine, and we would abandon that front room altogether.

"It is just as though there were a ghost in the room," she said to Susannah.

"Perhaps there is, my lady," was Susannah's cool reply.

On the Friday evening Dr. and Mrs. Parafin came in to tea. Our visit would end on the morrow. The old doctor held John before him in the lamplight, and decided that he looked better—that the stay had done him good.

"I am sure it has," assented Lady Whitney. "Just at first I feared he was going backward: but that must have been owing to the sleepless nights."

"Sleepless nights!" echoed the Doctor, in a curious tone.

"For the first three nights of our stay here, he never slept; *never slept at all.* After that ——"

"Which room did he occupy?" interrupted the Doctor, breathlessly. "Not the one over this?"

"Yes, it was. Why? Do you know anything against it?" questioned Lady Whitney, for she saw Dr. and Mrs. Parafin exchange glances.

"Only this: that I have heard of other people who were unable to sleep in that room," he answered.

"But what can be amiss with the room, Dr. Parafin?"

"Ah," said he, "there you go beyond me. It is, I believe, a fact, a singular fact, that there is something or other in the room which prevents people sleeping. Friends of ours who lived in the house before Miss Gay took it, ended by shutting the room up."

"Is it haunted, sir?" I asked. "Mr. Featherston thought it might be."

He looked at me and smiled, shaking his head. Mrs. Parafin nodded hers, as much as to say *It is.*

"Nobody has been able to get any sleep in that room since the Calsons lived here," said Mrs. Parafin, dropping her voice.

"How very strange!" cried Lady Whitney. "One might think murder had been done in it."

Mrs. Parafin coughed significantly. "The wife died in it," she said. "Some people thought her husband had—had—had at least hastened her death ——"

"Hush, Matty!" interposed the Doctor, warningly. "It was all rumour; all talk. Nothing was proved—or attempted to be."

"Perhaps there existed no proof," returned Mrs. Parafin. "And if there had—who was there to take it up? She was in her grave, poor woman, and he was left flourishing, master of himself and everybody about him. Anyway, Thomas, be that as it may, you cannot deny that the room has been like a haunted room since."

Dr. Parafin laughed lightly, objecting to be serious; men are more cautious than women. "I cannot deny that people find themselves unable to sleep in the room; I never heard that it was 'haunted' in any other way," he added, to Lady Whitney. "But there—let us change the subject; we can neither alter the fact nor understand it."

After they left us, Lady Whitney said she should like to ask Miss Gay what her experience of the room had been. But Miss Gay had stepped out to a neighbour's, and Susannah stayed to talk in her place. She could tell us more about it, she said, than Miss Gay.

"I warned my cousin she would do well not to take this house," began Susannah, accepting the chair to which Lady Whitney pointed. "But it is a beautiful house for letting, as you see, my lady, and that and the low rent tempted her. Besides, she did not believe the rumour about the room; she does not believe it fully yet, though it is beginning to worry her: she thinks the inability to sleep must lie in the people themselves."

"It has been an uncanny room since old Calson's wife died in it, has it not, Susannah?" said John, as if in jest. "I suppose he did not murder her?"

"*I think he did*," whispered Susannah.

The answer sounded so ghostly that it struck us all into silence.

Susannah resumed. "Nobody *knew*: but one or two suspected. The wife was a poor, timid, gentle creature, worshipping the very ground her husband trod on, yet always in awe of him. She lay in the room, sick, for many many months before she died. Old Sarah ——"

"What was her sickness?" interrupted Lady Whitney.

"My lady, that is more than I can tell you; more, I fancy, than anybody could have told. Old Sarah would often say to me that she did not believe there was any great sickness, only he made it out there was, and persuaded his wife so. He could just wind her round his little finger. The person who attended on her was one Astrea, quite a heathenish name I used to think, and a heathenish woman too: she was copper-coloured, and came with them from abroad. Sarah was in the kitchen, and there was only a man besides. I lived housekeeper at that time with an old lady on the Parade, and I looked in here from time to time to ask after the mistress. Once I was invited by Mr. Calson upstairs to see her: she lay in the room over this; the one that nobody can now sleep in. She looked so pitiful!—her poor, pale, patient face down deep in the pillow. Was she better, I asked; and what was it that ailed her. She thought it was not

much beside weakness, she answered, and that she felt a constant nausea; and she was waiting for the warm weather: her dear husband assured her she would be better when that came."

"Was he kind to her, Susannah?"

"He seemed to be, Master Johnny; very kind and attentive indeed. He would sit by the hour together in her room, and give her her medicine, and feed her when she grew too weak to feed herself, and sit up at night with her. A doctor came to see her occasionally; it was said he could not find much the matter with her but debility, and that she seemed to be wasting away. Well, she died, my lady; died quietly in that room; and Calson ordered a grand funeral."

"So did Jonas Chuzzlewit," breathed John.

"Whispers got afloat when she was under ground—not before—that there had been something wrong about her death; that she had not come by it fairly, or by the illness either," continued Susannah. "But they were not spoken openly; under the rose, as may be said; and they died away. Mr. Calson continued to live in the house as before; but he became soon ill. Real sickness, his was, my lady, whatever his wife's might have been. His illness was chiefly on the nerves; he grew frightfully thin; and the setting-in of some grave inward complaint was suspected: so if he did act in any ill manner to his wife it seemed he would not reap long benefit from it. All the medical men in Pumpwater were called to him in succession; but they could not cure him. He kept growing thinner and thinner till he was like a walking shadow. At last he shut up his house and went to London for advice; and there he died, fourteen months after the death of his wife."

"How long was the house kept shut up?" asked Lady Whitney, as Susannah paused.

"About two years, my lady. All his property was willed away to the little son of his brother, who lived over in Australia. Tardy instructions came from thence to Mr. Jermy the lawyer to let the house furnished, and Mr. Jermy put it into the hands of Bone the house-agent. A family took it, but they did not stay: then another family took it, and they did not stay. Each party went to Bone and told him that something was the matter with one of the rooms and nobody could sleep in it. After that, the furniture was sold off, and some people took the house by the year. They did not remain in it six months. Some other people took it then, and they stayed the year, but it was known that they shut up that room. Then the house stayed empty. My cousin, wanting a better house than the one she was in, cast many a longing eye towards it; finding it did not let, she went to Bone and asked him what the rent would be. Seventy pounds to her, he said; and she took it. Of course she had heard about the room, but she did not believe it; she thought, as Mr. Featherston said the other morning, that something must be wrong with the paper, and she had the walls scraped and cleaned and a fresh paper put on."

"And since then—have your lodgers found aught amiss with the room?" questioned Lady Whitney.

"I am bound to say they have, my lady. It has been the same story with them all—not able to get to sleep in it. One gentleman, an old post-captain, after trying it a few nights, went right away from Pumpwater, swearing at the air. But the most singular experience we have had was that of two little girls. They were kept in that room for two nights, and each night they cried and screamed all night long, calling out that they were frightened. Their mother could not account for it; they were not at all timid children, she said, and such a thing had never happened with them before. Altogether, taking one thing with another, I fear, my lady, that something *is* wrong with the room. Miss Gay sees it now: but she is not superstitious, and she asks *what* it can be."

Well, that was Susannah's tale: and we carried it away with us on the morrow.

Sir John Whitney found his son looking all the better for his visit to Pumpwater. Temporarily he was so. Temporarily only; not materially: for John died before the year was out.

Have I heard anything of the room since, you would like to ask. Yes, a little. Some eighteen months later, I was halting at Pumpwater for a few hours with the Squire, and ran to the house to see Miss Gay. But the house was empty. A black board stood in front with big white letters on it TO BE LET. Miss Gay had moved into another house facing the Parade.

"It was of no use my trying to stay in it," she said to me, shaking her head. "I moved into the room myself, Master Johnny, after you and my Lady Whitney left, and I am free to confess that I could not sleep. I had Susannah in, and she could not sleep; and, in short, we had to go out of it again. So I shut the room up, sir, until the year had expired, and then I gave up the house. It has not been let since, and people say it is falling into decay."

"Was anything ever *seen* in the room, Miss Gay?"

"Nothing," she answered, "or heard either; nothing whatever. The room is as nice a room as could be wished for in all respects, light, large, cheerful, and airy; and yet nobody can get to sleep in it. I shall never understand it, sir."

I'm sure I never shall. It remains one of those curious experiences that cannot be solved in this world. But it is none the less true.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

GEORGE HERBERT.

IN the course of our English springs and autumns there are a few perfect days in which the sun sheds exactly the right degree of warmth and heat: we are not scorched, we are not dazzled; the breeze brings us precisely the refreshment which braces weary nerves and frames. Yet sweet and fair as such days are, they are not days of which it is easy to give a long description. There is such a delicate blending of harmonious tints, such a mixture of charms that please every sense, that we cannot, strive as we will, find words to tell of our experiences.

How much more readily could we give an account of a day of storm, when the wind was howling, or the rain rushing down, or when the thunder roll and lightning flash were filling the ear with awful music, and making the landscape shine with strange, unwonted radiance! And how we could draw out, in glowing language, our narrative of days spent amid the glories of tropical brilliancy and beauty, when every gorgeous flower, and every spreading leaf, and every creeper that wrapped the tall tree trunks in a mantle of rich, luxuriant verdure, seems a wonder upon which our surprised mind cannot dwell too long!

What we have just said of the life of external nature, holds good when we come to give a vivid, distinct word-portrait of the lives of different men. A life full of violent passions, or of sudden, startling incidents, a life which now shows the height of virtue and now the depths of vice, is far more easy to describe than the calm, steadfast Christian life which shines with a uniform brightness from dawn to setting.

The life of George Herbert, the Christian pastor and poet, is one of these lives, of which, from its very beauty, its very changeless, subdued brightness, it is difficult to give a strongly-coloured picture that will bring out his image plainly and sharply, as we glance backward through the long colonnades of hard on three centuries. Yet it is such a life of Christian light and loveliness that we cannot choose but endeavour to do our utmost to make it come clearly, and in no uncertain shape, and tinged by no dim, watery tints, before the mental vision of our readers of to-day.

It was a spring morning in 1593, and still the age when the heart of England was throbbing with the wonders which the Reformation had wrought in the land, when pure Gospel truth was such a new thing in the nation still that men and women deemed it a most fair and rich possession. All the Welsh hills and valleys were bathed n a great tide of gold that had chased away the mountain mists nd the dewy vapours which rose from stream and meadow. In the

old Castle of Montgomery there was a stir and a bustle, and a running to and fro of serving men, and an important whispering among dames and damsels, both in curtained bower and by the broad kitchen hearth.

What is it all about? Let us go upstairs to see.

Down the long corridor we pass, and enter a chamber where feet are treading lightly. How warm, and heavy, and stifling the atmosphere of the room is! We wonder how an invalid—for it is most certainly a sick room; the darkened window tells us as much—can breathe in so sultry an air. Yet in the days to which we have transported ourselves every lady of rank, on occasions like the present, had to submit to weeks of imprisonment in a closely sealed chamber. Now let us draw near the bed, and pull back, softly, the heavy curtains which fold it round on every side. It must be a very slight opening that we make, or we shall call forth such a chorus of screams, and exclamations, and cries of horror from lady aunts and cousins as we shall not soon forget. The faintest current of air must not be allowed to creep into that sanctuary. What is it we see there, and which has been the centre of all the tumult and all the mystery which has pervaded the Castle since early dawn? It is a young mother sleeping with her new-born son at her side, and the infant is no other than George Herbert.

The child inherited noble blood from both his parents. And also from them both, especially from his mother, inborn nobleness of thought, word and action seem to have been his birthright. The chapter of his boyhood, unlike the usual case of young genius, tells of no wild pranks, no ungoverned whims and moods; it is all one shining morning, which gives full promise of what the day is to be. Those were times when Scripture texts were the daily food of the national mind, and many a Bible word made familiar music round his cradle; times when men and women could still tell, from personal recollections, how martyrs died for their faith. Many such a tale of Christian heroism must have made the boy's cheek glow and his eye flash. He had, probably, no child's books except his lesson-books; but Welsh ballad and romance filled his young fancy with greater and brighter wonders than leap out to-day from the many-tinted pictured page into the small heads that people our modern nurseries.

So the little lad grew on, finding day by day, in the very air around him, food to strengthen the sinews of the young Christian soldier, and the pinions of the waking poet. So he grew, under the high, pure, healthy influence of his mother, who was a woman well worthy of the task which God had put into her hands: the task of moulding the mind of George Herbert, and giving it a shape and colouring which it was to keep throughout his life.

In those days an English lad moved onward with a rapidity which seems, to our nineteenth-century eyes, to have something of the hot

house about it, and which we should have thought did not, in some cases, tend to promote mental development in a natural, healthy way. A child was a schoolboy when, in our age, he would still be in the nursery, and he was a university undergraduate when it appears to us that he ought still to have been playing at marbles. The result was frequently a certain stiffness and priggishness in bearing and conversation. This, however, does not seem to have been the case with George Herbert, for though he was sent to Westminster School at a very early age, and though we find him entered at Cambridge when he was but fifteen, he is said to have been always remarkable for a cheery, light-hearted brightness of manner, which made his presence like a brisk breeze wherever he came. He was a special favourite with both his companions and his teachers. Yet, with all his sweet, airy playfulness, his life was marked by a purity which stands out in radiant contrast to the lives of the generality of the English youth of rank of his day.

At college George Herbert's intellectual power made its weight felt in the classical studies of the university. His contemporaries all saw that a star was rising among them, but of what nature its light would be, and in what direction it would shine, no one, as yet, could foretell. When his terms at Cambridge were expired, his mind, which was not at this period so fully fixed on a life wholly given to God as it afterwards became, turned first towards a career at court as a statesman or a diplomatist, the path most generally taken and followed by young men of family in that age. The post of public orator just then fell vacant at the university. Young Herbert's eloquence was a household word at Cambridge, and he slipped quickly into the office as if it were his of right. The salary of public orator was a very small one, but it brought its holder into general notice, and it was therefore sought after by rising young men of the day.

Soon, however, his heart began to feel searchings which stirred him up towards a nobler calling. He left suddenly the many-coloured life he was living: now at the university which loved his flashing wit, now in London which flattered his stately grace of person and carriage. From classic haunts, from gilded halls he vanished, and for a while the world heard no more of him. Scholars and fair court ladies wondered for a brief time about him, and then forgot him for the latest news in politics, and the latest fashion in dress. Meanwhile George Herbert, in a retired country region among the fields and woods of Kent, was finding his way to the high service for which, from the beginning, his Master above had intended him.

From this silence and solitude he at length came forth with a face that was as the face of one who had been communing with angels. He took holy orders at once, and was appointed to the prebendship of Leighton Ecclesia, near Lincoln. Thither he went, not slow to begin his work. Ruined, dilapidated church and drowsy parish soon felt the power of his energy. But ill-health, which was quickly developed out

of his natural delicacy of constitution in the unwholesome Lincolnshire air fresh from the fenns, forced him to leave his post almost before he had become fully aware of his new cares and duties. He gave up Leighton, and went to stay with a friend in Essex.

For some little time it seemed unlikely that he would ever do any more work in this world. Symptoms of consumption showed themselves, and all his friends feared that he would glide into a rapid decline. At this period Herbert's bearing was calm and cheerful; and steadfast in faith and hope, he awaited his call above. But it was not to be given just yet. Gradually his health recovered a certain extent of tone and vigour. To the end of his life he suffered from physical weakness; but he was now well enough to seek further change of air by going to stay with his kinsman, Lord Pembroke, at Wilton near Salisbury.

Here bracing Wiltshire breezes and cheerful society confirmed yet more his cure. Just then, the living of Bemerton, a village in the neighbourhood of Salisbury, was in need of a clergyman. It was in Lord Pembroke's gift, and he presented it to his young cousin, of whom he entertained a very high opinion. Soon after that, George Herbert was established in the vicarage at Bemerton.

A story is told of his induction to the living which forms a fitting key-note to the whole of his work and ministry there. As is usual on such occasions, the new incumbent locked himself into the church to ring the bell. This is commonly a short, formal ceremony; and those who accompanied Herbert naturally expected to see him quickly reappear. The minutes, however, went by, the shadow of the church spire fell longer and longer across the graveyard walk, many feet went up and down the village lane, but still the church door was not unlocked. What could George Herbert be about? The churchwardens fidgeted uneasily to and fro in the churchyard walk; Lord Pembroke looked grave, and began to think that really, after all, his young cousin was too eccentric a man to fill a commonplace position in every-day life. They listened at the church door, but no sound reached their ears; they tapped lightly the old, time-worn panels, but there was no response. At length, driven to desperation, they peeped in at the church window, and their impatience was changed into reverent stillness; there they beheld George Herbert on his knees.

Very soon after he entered his new home the young clergyman began to feel that there was something wanting in it—something that would fill it with light and music; and this something, which his mother had taught him long ago to know the worth of, was the presence of a woman.

Not very far off in Wiltshire there lived a Mr. Danvers, who had been for some years on terms of familiar intimacy with Herbert. This gentleman had several unmarried daughters, and the one among them whose fair face told most of the fairer soul shining within was called Jane. Now it so happened that this young lady had heard

about George Herbert, and talked and thought and dreamt of him, till without being aware of the fact she had fallen in love with him, though she had never seen him, or even heard his voice. On the other hand, George Herbert had had the graces of Jane Danvers ringing in his ears, from the lips of all the ladies of the family, all the while he was staying with his relations at Wilton, and had, no doubt, idealised the maiden in his poet's fancy. The result when the two met was, however, yet more swift and complete than even the most daring visions of a match-making maiden aunt had ever foreseen as possible. In three days after that first meeting Jane Danvers was Mrs. George Herbert.

The marriage was as happy, and bright, and peaceful as the course of two streams which have suddenly met, coming from different ways to flow on in one calm channel. Their minds harmonised in a taste for intellectual pleasures; their hearts harmonised in all warm and generous sympathies towards their fellow-men. Best of all, their souls harmonised in high Christian hope and faith, and brave Christian practice. From that time forward, till she knelt by his dying bed, with her trust in her Heavenly Father's will making a rainbow in her tears, Jane Herbert was his help, his star, his melody; the queen of his home, the moonlight of his parish and his parish work.

It is a fair picture, that of George Herbert, in those years of his ministry at Bemerton. Before he came thither there had been, for many a year, no resident clergyman in the village, and the place had fallen into a condition of hopeless spiritual stagnation which, in these days, it is difficult even to imagine. Now, before many months had passed, it was all changed as by some gracious, mighty spell that had come straight from Heaven. The church was filled to overflowing, the word of God was in every hand, the fruits of the blessed Book was in every life.

Now we see him in the pulpit, the pale, sweet face all on fire from above, the thin hand raised in warning and supplication in turns, the earnest voice, with the pathetic break now and then in it that tells of disease and weakness, pouring forth words that grow bolder and stronger as they flow, and as the crowds of vivid imagery that are starting up in his brain, press into them. Now he is hurrying forth through sleet and hail on a winter's night to watch by the sick and dying. Now he is sitting at supper with some parishioner, his stately grace of manner contrasting strangely with that of his rustic guest, yet in no way hindering the tide of genial Christian sympathy which flows between them, rippling from lip to lip, shining from eye to eye. It is all from beginning to end one noonday splendour of work, of love, of energy, done in the name and the strength of the Christian champion's Lord.

And what words shall tell of the perfume, the mellowed radiance, the blending of sweet accords in that home at Bemerton, where prayer and praise guarded the threshold—where the sick and aged came to

seek relief and healing from Jane Herbert's gentle, skilful hand—where the whole atmosphere was full of the busy calm of steadfast, cheerful work—where the two little nieces whom the childless pair had adopted went dancing and singing to and fro between aunt's store-room and uncle's study, never so pleased as when some small errand of love was put into their charge?

Throughout all his life George Herbert was writing poetry, but no volume of his poems was published till after his death. His unassuming, sincere modesty seems to have been the cause of this. But in his last illness, his friend and curate, Mr. Woodnot, consulted him on the matter, and then he said that if his poems could be of any use to others in showing them his own spiritual conflicts, and how, through trust in his Saviour's merits, he had at length found peace, he was willing that they should be made known to the world. Accordingly, after he had gone up to God, his friends brought out a volume of his verses in print; the book became a favourite at once, and 20,000 copies of it were sold with a rapidity very unusual in those days. Glowing religious devotion that burns in every line, and a rich luxuriance of fancy that is always budding out into beautiful similes—these are the most marked characteristics of George Herbert's poetry.

Herbert's intellectual powers were not unrecognised, however, in his life-time. We find him now and then in London, and many figures of note are gathering round him as we gaze. Here is a form in velvet doublet and lace ruffles—a form that is all courtly grace, and that revels in showers of bows, while the lips rejoice in delicate conceits; this is Sir Henry Wotton. Next, a grave, scholarly-looking man, with thought printed on his brow, comes and lays his hand familiarly on Herbert's shoulder, and we know this is Donne, the poet-preacher. After that we see him exchanging a kindly salutation in the street with a burly figure which comes rolling along; and the name he calls this acquaintance is Ben Jonson.

George Herbert was not to remain long on earth. His gallant work for God and man, the joy he gave his friends, these things were to cease early as far as this world was concerned. As he drew toward middle life, his delicacy of lungs and chest began to make itself painfully apparent. He struggled bravely against disease and weakness for some little time; then, at the age of 39, he left his mortal dwelling with all its cares and all its sweetness, and went to his home above.

ALICE KING.

FLOSS.

By the Author of "Mrs. Jerningham's Journal."

III.

I CERTAINLY thought that I saw recognition in her eyes, succeeded by an expression of piteous entreaty, a mute acknowledgment that there was a secret between us, and a prayer that I would not betray her. Afterwards I was not at all certain that I had read all this or no. If I had, it was so momentary—gone as soon as seen—that it was impossible I could be certain about it. And yet why should I fancy it? Why should I think I did, if I did not? for while I saw it, I did not doubt it in the least.

I don't think anyone heard my exclamation, the involuntary "Floss" that passed my lips. I think Heathcote was a little surprised for a moment. I think there was something in our first salutation which was not exactly commonplace, not quite what he expected; but if he had heard me call the young lady Floss, he would certainly have noticed it, and asked what I meant, and why I said "Floss," instead of "How do you do?" Mr. Fairfax was languidly lounging on a distant sofa, where he had sunk after Miss Heathcote had passed him, and Miss Mackenzie was knitting in another window.

There were a good many things I objected to in Miss Mackenzie, and one of them was that she was never idle. When there was nothing else to do she invariably produced from her capacious pocket a slip of white knitting. Now, in my opinion, nobody has a right to be always employed. I take it as an abuse of our faculties, and a reproach to those who are more moderate and less reckless in their use. Another of her peculiarities was that she invariably said the thing that she had better not have said. Whenever two or three words would make anybody uncomfortable, she always uttered them. Whether it was want of tact or ill-nature I am not sure, but the thing that had better not be said was always the thing that *was* said by her.

The whole of that evening I had an uncomfortable notion that we had a ghost among us. Miss Heathcote was so white and so quiet, there was something so shadowy about her in her transparent black draperies, her ghastly fair face, and in the noiseless way in which she glided about. I felt a little shiver run through me when she handed me my tea. Did the others, I wondered, experience the same? She never spoke unless she was spoken to, and she had never once raised her eyes since that first look at me. My head was full of fancies about her, and presently I began to feel an absurdly impatient desire to hear her called by her name.

Would anyone call her Floss? And what might Floss be short for? Flora?—Florida? And was it not strange that with father, lover, and aunt all present, no name of hers had passed any of their lips? My daughter, or Miss Heathcote, and never anything else.

Just as I thought this Sir George Heathcote made me jump by addressing her with the words: "Another lump of sugar, Florence."

Florence! Well Floss might be short for Florence, just as much as or Florida or Flora. Trifles light as air, some might say, but this trifle did seem tremendously confirming. No proof of holy writ could have produced a greater sense of conviction in my mind than that one word Florence. I felt utterly bewildered as the comprehension of what it really meant, really was, if I was not mistaken, became clearer to me. As I was less startled and confused, and more able to understand the situation, my bewilderment was overwhelming.

Pshaw! I *must* be mistaken; it *could* not be; what a fool I was to be upset in this ridiculous manner by an accidental resemblance.

"Were you out to-day, Miss Heathcote?" I asked, bravely.

"Yes, for a little while," in a low monotonous voice.

"You seemed quite well all the morning; I never *heard* of the headache till dinner-time," Miss Mackenzie, of course, remarked; but received no reply.

Mr. Fairfax sauntered up to the tea-table.

"I did a deal of business this time in London," he said. "I think everything is in trim now. Florence, do you like chestnut or bay horses best? I had almost gone in for buying, but I would not decide till I asked you."

"I don't know," she said, wearily; "I don't care for horses."

"Do you care for anything?" asked her aunt, sharply. "Girls were very different in my days; they took some interest in things."

"I don't like horsey girls," said Mr. Fairfax, with his languid drawl. But with all his fashionable impressiveness I noticed he always said the right thing at the right moment. "I'll choose the best and the prettiest horses I can get, and they won't be too good for their purpose."

No blush, or smile, or glance, rewarded this speech, and I thought he was a patient lover.

"Did you bring the photographs down with you?" Sir George asked.

"To be sure, I'd quite forgotten; they are in the pocket of my great coat. They came at the last moment, of course; too late to be packed." He rang the bell, and sent the man who answered it for the parcel.

"We have all been photographed," Heathcote informed me; "cabinet size. So now you shall give us your opinion of the likenesses."

The parcel came in, and was opened. There was Sir George, in full regimentals, uncommonly good; Mr. Fairfax, well enough, but

a little hard; and, the last of them, I took Miss Heathcote's portrait in my hand. I wondered that a lover or a father's heart could bear to see it for a moment. Such hopeless, despairing misery I never beheld. And yet how beautiful it was, and how like! I should not have recognised Floss in it, though; the whole character, everything seemed so different, and these, of course, told us as little as they always do tell in photographs. "I don't believe she is Floss at all," I mentally exclaimed. "What a fool I have been! Misled by the likeness in a pair of eyes—for I really think that must be the whole of it."

"It is a striking likeness," I said to Mr. Fairfax, for I saw I was expected to speak, and not to stand, wrapt in thought, picture in hand. "It is a striking likeness, but not a good impression; there is a little smudge, do you see, on one cheek." I took up another of them. "Yes; there it is again on that, too, and on this," taking up another. "They all seem to have it."

Fairfax laughed a little, and Miss Mackenzie said, rather loudly: "That's the mole on her cheek." Involuntarily, I turned my eyes on Miss Heathcote's face. Yes, there it was, below the temple, on the left cheek; a soft brown mole! Could I doubt any longer after that? I declare you might have knocked me down with a feather.

And now what was I to do or to say? What ought I to do or to say? What duty did I owe my friend? And how far was I bound in honour to the lady? And where, *where*—above every other question—where was Charlie?

Charlie might be dead; but one thing, at any rate, I was sure of, he had not died of that wound in his shoulder. And if Charlie was dead, Floss was a widow; and if Floss was a widow, why was she called Miss Heathcote?

One thought after another went chasing each other through my mind, till I was suddenly recalled to the drawing-room of Lowlands, by Heathcote's voice, saying: "You have cultivated a grand talent for silence, I think, since I saw you last, Dashwood."

I could have laughed in his face. Poor father!—poor, innocent father!—quietly quizzing me for absence of mind. If he knew the cause of it—if he only knew the cause!

However, with a considerable effort I recovered myself, and spoke out of the fulness of my mind, in a sort of reckless spirit, determined to make a plunge, even if I drowned for it.

"I'm not generally a very silent fellow, but something had somehow made me think of a visit I once paid to Guernsey. Were you, any of you, ever there?"

"Guernsey, Jersey, Alderney, and Sark," said Mr. Fairfax gravely. "No; I don't think one goes there, does one? but one learns the names all in a heap when one is six years old."

"And much good it does one," said Miss Mackenzie. "I took trouble enough to teach Florence geography, I am sure, and only last

Thursday she asked whether Constantinople was in Egypt. Now, I dare say she knows nothing whatever about those islands."

"Come, Florence, prove Aunt Libby wrong," said Mr. Fairfax. "I'm sure you know all about Guernsey and Jersey. Tell her about Guernsey, Florence."

I was breathless, listening and watching.

The girl's lips moved in a ghostly manner, without giving utterance to any sound. I felt I was cruel, yet I persevered.

"We all know the geography of the places we have been in," I said. "Miss Heathcote, perhaps, has been in Guernsey?" My manner was one of the gentlest inquiry.

Then the splendid dark eyes suddenly flashed at me more and more, and in them lay the piteous expression of a hunted animal at bay, who had moral perception to condemn its hunter. I felt reproved, and determined to desist. Let her have been Floss; let her now be Miss Heathcote; let her become Mrs. Fairfax. What business was it of mine? Accident had made me the possessor of her secret. I was not her keeper. Honour enjoined me to let her alone. Then the words sounded in my ears—words long forgotten, but suddenly coming back to me out of the past: "Is there a doctor in the house?" and while I was listening to these words, I found Miss Heathcote's soft, monotonous voice was answering my question.

"I have travelled very little," she said; and so she saved herself from falsehood; no thanks to me.

"Florence was at school in France for many years," her father remarked.

"Much against my wishes, and much good it did her," was the pleasant rejoinder Miss Mackenzie, of course, had ready.

"It was an excellent school," Heathcote rejoined, in that stiff way of his I knew so well when he objected to a remark on the score of its being a little impertinent; "not only for education, but for motherly care and training."

"Motherly mountebanks—a French school!" cried Miss Mackenzie, worlds of scorn in her tone.

"It is getting late, sir; I think we are all tired to-night," said Mr. Fairfax's calm accents. I am sure he spoke to the world of weariness in his betrothed's fair face.

"And, indeed, a railway journey is a tiring thing when we are not quite as young as we were. You'll be glad to get to bed, Doctor Dashwood," said Miss Mackenzie, very pointedly, to me.

What a detestable old woman she was! I was years younger than Heathcote, and, in every respect, looks and all, a young man of my age. I could have taken any length of journey by train without feeling fatigue on that score. I have seldom felt crosser at a trifle than I did then, and I should have experienced pleasure in giving the hard Scotchwoman a good shake. "What an idiot Heathcote is to have her live with him!" I thought; but outwardly I only smiled

an inane smile, and assured her I was by no means overwhelmed by the extraordinary exertions of the day. We all wished each other good night. I was most anxious to let Miss Heathcote know that her secret, whatever it was, was safe in my hands, and that no further attentions of mine should alarm or distress her; but I did not know how to manage this, with her eyes always downcast, never raised to meet the gaze of another.

Her hand was in mine, and I gave it a very slight pressure. I *felt* a throb go up through her frame, and the unhappy eyes were raised for an instant. If ever a man's face wore on it the promise of honour and kindness, mine must have done so at that moment; my soul was so full of it. But the effect on her was not what I had expected and hoped. Her eyes became actually wild—there was an expression of horror in them and terror—wild horror and wild terror. Was that dreadful look always in her eyes, and was that why she never raised the lids; or was it that she could not bear the recalling of the past that lay in the meaning in my face?—the realisation from that that I *was* the man, and her secret was not her own?

I cannot tell, but this I know: that as I dropped her hand almost terror-struck and not knowing what to do, I perceived that Mr. Edmond Fairfax was watching us both closely, and looking most unfeignedly surprised.

No wonder he was surprised. What must he think of it, and how would it end? I wished heartily that I had never come down to Lowlands at all, and I began to think seriously of going away before the wedding.

Notwithstanding the extraordinary fatigues of an eight hours' railway journey to a man of my age, I by no means slept as well as usual that night; my mind was too full of this strange and unpleasant romance in which I so suddenly found myself involved. Now and then in the nervous hours of the night, when we are not masters of our minds as we are in the daytime, it seemed to me that it was my duty to tell her father or her lover all that I knew; and then I would jump from my bed and pace the room in great perturbation of spirit. Exercise of body brought back mental mastery, and I scouted the idea as against all laws of honour. My one desire in the morning was to see her again, and let her know that I was not unkind, and that whatever her sins and sorrows might be she had nothing to fear from me.

But at breakfast she did not appear, and her aunt informed Mr. Fairfax quite pleasantly that she had had a bad night—was ill, and it looked, to *her*, like a return of nervous fever.

Against his will an expression of deep anxiety came into his eyes, which his code of fashion tried to make express only indifference.

"Phew!" Sir George said; "that is nonsense."

"My niece is in a very odd state of health and *spirits*," was the

reply, with aggravating emphasis; "fitter for a hospital, *I* think, than to be married."

"Experience having made you an excellent judge of both," Fairfax said, very politely; but though his countenance was imperturbable, I could see that he was angry.

Heathcote laughed. Was he really not anxious about his daughter, and as obtuse as he seemed? The idea suddenly struck me that he knew all about her. But no—then Fairfax would have known also; for my old friend was the soul of honour. I resolved to learn all he could tell me of the engagement, for I began to feel like a conspirator who had joined in a plot against father and lover, and I wanted light thrown on my own situation as well as hers.

After breakfast, accordingly, I made him take me for a walk round The Limes, and then began to question him.

"They have been engaged half their lives," he told me, "by a family agreement between Lord Fairfax and myself. The properties join; she is an only daughter, and I can leave her everything, so we thought it a good plan."

"And are they attached to each other?" I asked, warily.

"Fairfax is as much attached to her as a man can be, and it will be all right with Florence when they are married, I have not a doubt about it. But you see her state of health now."

"Has she always had bad health and spirits?"

"Oh, dear no. She was the merriest child, and Fairfax declares that at fifteen she was the life of every party she was in—the gayest creature. They used to meet during her holidays; and when she was fifteen and he only a lad himself he told her what was intended, and she quite agreed. He fell in love with her, though she was a complete child, and laughed while she consented."

"And they have been engaged ever since?"

"No, they have *not*. At least, they *have*, because we always intended it; but two years afterwards she suddenly wrote and told him it was all a joke, or a mistake, and broke it off."

"And what did he do?"

"He would not hear of it. He held her to the engagement, but told her to wait till he could woo and win her properly."

"Did it never occur to him," I said, slowly and doubtfully, for I felt the ground was dangerous, "that she might—care—for someone else?"

Sir Marmaduke looked angry as he replied:

"Never! because it was impossible; she had seen no one—unless at school."

He spoke with such cool assurance that I could have laughed in his face, but it was a matter more for tears than laughter. And when I asked him how the engagement had come on again he answered, a little testily, that it didn't come on again because it had never been broken off. He told me further that he had not heard of her letter,

but hearing that she was in bad health, sent for her to India on that account—that they had been little with him as he was up the country, and she with old friends at Madras; that before they came home together the lady she was with told him her spirits were very fitful, and she thought she was pining for her lover, which had vexed him, as it seemed to him a little unneeded.

Wonderful! my poor friend; and if he had only known!

He said he had never spoken to her about this marriage till they were on the voyage home, and then she was dreadfully agitated; and at last told him that she had broken it off and could not marry him. Of course, he was exceedingly angry, and said no child of his should behave so dishonourably. There was a most distressing scene, after which she kept her bed for a week; she seemed more afraid of him than ever when they met, and they equally avoided a tête-à-tête.

"Poor girl," said I, "and she looks miserable now."

He assured me that was only from the fever. Then he suddenly admitted that he had had the greatest trouble with her—that her being so afraid of him distressed him; but in spite of the fear she had been utterly obstinate, and would not consent to be married. He considered her a most fortunate girl; and Fairfax had behaved admirably throughout. Now that he had broken the ice it seemed to me he found relief in telling his story.

"Then," he continued, "all of a sudden one day she was found in a fainting fit in the dressing-room. Such a fainting fit! Girls are extraordinary things. No *man* could have come to life out of it. It lasted for hours. I thought she was dead—I did indeed, and she never left her bed for nine weeks after it! That was the fever, you know. Her recovery was like a dead person coming to life again. And she was, and has been ever since completely changed—quite passive, and submitting to everything. Fairfax at last made her consent to marry him. She said she would in a year and a day from the day she was taken ill. Once there was a talk of having it a fortnight sooner, and she would not hear of it, and that is the only time I have seen her excited since her illness."

I felt like a traitor, knowing what I did, when I said—but I surely should have said the same had I known nothing: "Well, Heathcote, I come back to my first idea—a prior attachment."

"There is none!" he cried, with a decision that startled me. "Fairfax asked her. He said if there was a living man she preferred to him, he would not press his claims. She was deeply distressed and frightened, and said there was not."

"She said there was not!"

"You speak as if you did not believe me!"

I was absolutely silent for a minute, and then remarked, awkwardly, that I hoped it would after all be a happy marriage. What else could I say, and I was obliged to say something.

"It is all a question of health," he said, with decision; "and Fairfax will take her abroad for a year. They are going to ——"

"Guernsey?" I asked. Why did I say it? What a fool I was! The word presented itself so loudly in my thoughts that my tongue uttered it before I was aware.

He was greatly taken with the idea. They had not intended it, but yachting had been recommended, and a trip to the Channel Islands would be the very thing. He would suggest it to Florence.

"And say that I proposed it," groaned I to myself. "What a fool I am! What will she think of me? It is the conduct of a spiteful fiend."

So I earnestly set to work to persuade Sir Marmaduke that no place could be worse for his daughter than any of the Channel Islands, and that Guernsey was the most objectionable of all. I spoke with the authority of my profession. The damp, relaxing air would play the very deuce with her nerves; death might be the result; I would answer for nothing if she went to Guernsey. He was surprised at my vehemence, and quite began to soothe me as he promised to follow my advice, and declared that nobody had ever thought of Guernsey till I did. And I felt that from first to last I had made a fool of myself.

We had reached the house, and Heathcote went in; but Mr. Fairfax joined me in the garden. He glanced oddly at me, and I remembered that he had seen the look I exchanged with Floss the night before; so I began to talk of the garden with keen interest.

He answered to the point, and gave me civil attention; yet I could see he was absent. All of a sudden he said: "Miss Heathcote is no better," and looked hard at me.

"I'm sorry to hear it," was all I could think of saying. "Is she subject to these nervous attacks?"

"I don't know," he answered, gloomily; "not unless anything upsets her; she seemed upset last night, I think." Another look at me.

"Did she?" I returned. "I am glad if that is not her usual manner. Frankly, Mr. Fairfax, it is sad to see a young woman like *that*."

"Had you met her before?" he cried, with an abruptness that made me jump. "Excuse me, but I thought you looked at each other as if you had."

"My dear Mr. Fairfax," I rapidly answered, without giving myself time to reflect on how much truth or falsehood might be in my words, "I looked at her with the interest of my profession—to me there is something very remarkable in the expression of her eyes."

He stared at me, while a sudden alarm flashed across his face. I had struck a chord that he had heard before.

"Good heavens!" he cried, "you do not apprehend ——" His eyes finished the sentence for him.

I hastily assured him I did *not*, but cautiously hinted that nervous

disorders were my speciality, and I should like to pay Miss Heathcote a professional visit.

"She hates doctors," he said, gloomily; "but as an old friend of her father's might see *you*. She has no faith in them. She was sure she'd die in that fever. And, by heaven! I believe she wished it. Do you know that she has worn black ever since?"

The last words rushed out as if against his will, and quite fiercely. He showed great emotion, and I was unaffectedly sorry for him. Like Sir Marmaduke, the ice broken, it seemed a relief to him to speak.

"It is miserably sad," he said, while his eyes asked me to contradict him. "And if you can do any good ——" He really could not say more.

"If she will see me, I will do my utmost."

The day wore itself away: no one seemed to know what to do with themselves, a gloom hung over everybody and everything. Miss Heathcote did not appear at dinner, and Mr. Fairfax said she would not hear of seeing me; declared she had only a headache, and should be as well as usual to morrow.

"Yes, but what *is* as well as usual?" I said, pointedly.

I could not forget the wild agony in her eyes. I felt it would be a sin to make light of her case. If they would let her alone—let her go unmarried—the poor weary, torn heart might get rest.

"You make the worst of it," he replied, in gloomy displeasure.

"I hope I do, but I frankly tell you I think the marriage should be deferred."

"You are quite wrong there. All the doctors say just the contrary; and I'm certain they are right."

"Is the day fixed?"

"Yes, to-morrow fortnight, and next week the guests begin to arrive."

It was a dull dinner, and a dreary sort of an evening; everybody was out of spirits. A weight hung over us all, heavy as frost, and deep almost as life.

"This is an odd way of being married," Miss Mackenzie suddenly remarked, àpropos to nothing.

"It won't be your way, will it?" drawled Mr. Fairfax, in his civil, languid manner.

"I hope you will like it, as it *is* yours," retorted she.

The next morning Miss Heathcote appeared at luncheon. She had appeared like a ghost yesterday, and to-day she resembled the ghost of a ghost more than anything else I could imagine. It was really shocking to see a young creature look as she did; and how father, lover, or aunt could allow matters to proceed at all, I did not understand. I am sure she only came downstairs to avoid the medical visit she thought I might insist on paying her, and she gave me the idea of being in mortal terror—a terror which I believe was

caused by my presence, and which, at all hazards, I felt that I must relieve.

After luncheon—Mr. Fairfax, who was grave, and, I declare, I thought even pale from sympathy, perhaps—proposed to drive her out. I wondered whether they really had têtes-à-tête, and what they did with them if they had; but at all events, she declined this one. Without raising her eyes she said, in that low, expressionless voice of hers, that she was not equal to it, but must go and lie down. And then she vanished, and did not appear again till tea-time. I really felt unequal to keeping up a conversation with either Heathcote or Mr. Fairfax, so I retired to my own room for the afternoon, on the plea of having letters to write. When there, however, I spent a good deal of my time walking up and down, and reflecting as to what ought to be done—which meant, in fact, what *I* ought to do.

Only one thing I could clearly see my way to; or, perhaps, I might say two things. The first was, not to betray Miss Heathcote, and to let her know that I would not betray her; and the second, to get the marriage deferred. Once deferred, there is no saying that a thing will ever take place, and this is most especially supposed to be the case with a wedding. Once miss an opportunity, and somehow or other it is not only missed, but lost. At teatime, I turned the conversation, taking advantage of some case that had appeared in the papers that day, to the inconsistency of punishments as dealt to offenders. This easily, and without the least strain, led to offences, legal and otherwise, and I made my argument that offences not punishable by law were, as a general rule, far worse than offences that were. I took the common instances of starving people stealing bread; and yet the starving wretch who stole food would be as severely punished as if I stole Mr. Fairfax's diamond pin. Then I went on to say that there were other crimes, that in the eye of the law were not crimes at all—for instance, deceiving a person, or betraying a secret. Here I raised my voice, and began almost a harangue; and I saw Heathcote regarding me with surprise, and doubtless thinking to himself "How a few years does change a fellow!" for in the old days haranguing was by no means one of my tendencies.

"A man who accidentally becomes acquainted with a secret——" I paused, markedly. "Miss Heathcote, may I ask for another lump of sugar." I was determined to secure her attention, and pretended not to hear Sir George's "Dear me, Dashwood—why, you never used to take sugar at all!"

"A man," I repeated, having made sure that if Miss Heathcote had been in a brown study, I had roused her out of it, "who accidentally becomes acquainted with a secret, and does not keep it—who does not feel himself bound by honour and humanity, although no promise has passed his lips"—I said this very emphatically—"I think is far more guilty than he who steals property

that he can grasp in his hand, and which, like the secret, belongs to another."

The splendid eyes rose at this moment to meet mine, an eager question in them, which mine answered, and then they sank again—surely I did not fancy it?—with a wistful expression that made my heart beat fearfully fast.

But—why is there always a *but* in everything?—we were not the only people in the room with eyes, and again I saw that Mr. Fairfax had intercepted our glances, and was regarding us with grave and puzzled surprise. I suppose, in a quiet, unperceived way, he was always watching Miss Heathcote.

I assumed the most dégagé air in the world, and went talking on—prosing, I am afraid—till Sir George groaned; and then I saw that Fairfax was still looking at me, and with the eyes of a detective. Why, I had thought the man slow, and that almost anything might occur under his very nose without his perceiving it, and all the time he was as sharp as a needle!

"But with regard to those secrets?" he said, with his pleasant drawl. "Secrets are shadowy, shabby sort of things, to begin with, are not they? And for people to be going about with secrets and—and private understandings—among unsuspecting ladies and gentlemen, is a little *base*, isn't it?"

I did not think it possible he could really imagine how a private understanding existed between Miss Heathcote and myself; but the more I saw of Mr. Fairfax the more I liked him, and I began to worry myself as much about him as for her. For his sake, as well as for hers, the marriage ought not to take place, and I was the only person who could prevent it. But how could I, when I had just voluntarily, and with determination, tied myself hand and foot? Had I not bound myself to Miss Heathcote not to betray her, even if I was not bound before?

The next day, and the day after, she was no better, and only appeared at tea.

Then I took courage, and on the following morning told Sir Marmaduke that the strain was too much for his daughter's nerves, and that, as a medical man, I advised the postponement of the marriage till they were stronger.

He would not hear of it, any more than Mr. Fairfax; and after some arguing I urged that, at any rate, it should be a quiet wedding. He was not so unwilling here, and said he would talk it over with the bridegroom.

He found Mr. Fairfax in an anxious state of mind, and quite ready to agree that a quiet wedding might be best.

Accordingly, a good many guests were put off. Those that must be asked could assemble at Lord Fairfax's, and only a few come to Lowlands at all, and that not till the eve of the wedding-day. I offered to go too, but Marmaduke begged me to stay, and said I was

a comfort to him. And as I saw he was feeling more than he chose to own, and had also myself an intense anxiety to see the play out, I remained.

I think we all felt more or less that something was looming in the distance. For my own part, though I will not admit that my fears took a tangible form, I found myself always thinking of the "Bride of Lammermoor." Lucy Ashton was for ever in my head, and I kept fancying resemblances between her and Miss Heathcote, till, in self-defence, I took down the third volume of that terrible book, and read bits here and there, trying to convince myself that I was tormented by a mere fancy. I was overwhelmed with confusion when Sir Marmaduke found me with the book in my hand, and was eager to disabuse his mind of the ideas such a sight must give rise to. I need not have troubled myself. He laughed at me for reading a novel, but admitted that Scott was worth a second perusal; and as to the "Bride of Lammermoor," he said: "Do you know I think it the best he ever wrote. I read it on board ship, and was very much struck with it; only *no* people, you know, could put a girl into such a position as *that!*"

And so the days passed on; and, but for the interest that deepened every hour, I have seldom spent a more painful time. And to every one in the house I am sure it was a time of weariness and fear. During the last few days before the wedding, Miss Heathcote had more colour in her cheeks, more light in her eyes, and sometimes joined in the conversations; but I noticed that instead of seeming cheered at this, Mr. Fairfax was even graver than before.

One evening she suddenly spoke without being spoken to—an un-ghostlike proceeding that gave me pleasure.

"You won't forget, Edward," she said, "to continue the allowance to old Widow Jones."

"How can he forget, with you there to remind him?" her father asked, smiling.

"I mean when I am dead," she replied, simply.

It was as if a thunderbolt had fallen among us.

She blushed, and looked as beautiful as an angel, and said: "I forgot that papa did not know. I have told Edward."

"What do I not know?" asked Sir Marmaduke, with suppressed emotion.

"Nothing, sir, nothing," said Fairfax. "Only an absurd notion of Florence's. She has got it into her head these last few days that she is going to—to—die!"

Poor fellow! he could hardly get out the words, and there were tears in his voice, though he affected to laugh.

"Bless my soul, how very extraordinary!" cried Heathcote.

"She ought to be ashamed of herself," said Miss Mackenzie.

"I don't see that," said Fairfax; "it isn't wrong to die."

"But *why* do you think it, Miss Heathcote?" I asked, mildly.

"I don't think it," she replied. "I feel it—I know it."

"I think it is foolish to talk so," Fairfax said, with assumed calmness. "It is a thing no one can know."

"I say she ought to be ashamed of herself; it is shocking and unnatural," reiterated Miss Mackenzie.

"Dear me!" said Fairfax, innocently. "I thought death was an act of Nature."

"And you ought to be ashamed of yourself, too," she exclaimed, angrily. "One would think you wished her to die!"

And then she burst out crying; and for the first time I felt that I liked the old woman.

My fingers stole stealthily to the wrist of the fair girl, which was deadly cold this warm summer's day. I felt, and then I spoke:

"Then let me tell you," said I, "that the wish, humanly speaking, has no chance of being gratified. The pulse I am feeling is that of a person who may live to three score years and ten for any serious mischief existing now."

Everybody looked relieved, except the young lady herself, who gently shook her head.

Next morning she came down to breakfast in a state of exultation—the first time I had seen her at the breakfast-table. It was the day before the wedding. That evening a few guests were to arrive; and if this glow and brightness lasted she might, to eyes that were not penetrating, pass as a good imitation of a happy bride.

After breakfast she took Fairfax into the garden, the first tête-à-tête she had, to my knowledge, permitted. He agreed, with his usual calmness, and the lovers, if such they could be called, disappeared among the shrubberies.

Later in the day he asked me to smoke with him in the stable-yard.

"I want your advice," said he. We were very good friends in a quiet way, he and I. "Miss Heathcote has had—a dream." And he looked oddly at me from the corner of his eye.

"Ah!" I said, startled; "a dream!—may I hear it?"

"She dreamt she was—*dead*—lying in her coffin. It was white. She was in her wedding-dress—white flowers in her hair—all white together. And she is as sure as I am that I stand here now, that she will die to-morrow. She *knows* we shall *not* be married!"

He chucked away the end of his cigar, and spoke the last words fiercely. "She says we may go to the altar, but we shall not be married. She was not buried in that coffin. She was in Heaven. She knows it was Heaven by a sign she had; but she would not tell me the sign. Well, what do you think of it?" And he stared me in the face.

What did I think of it, and what could I say I thought of it?

"You know," I began, slowly, "I *wanted* the wedding deferred—but ——"

"It is too late now. It might have been better if we had followed your advice; but we did not, and now it's too late. We could not defer the marriage the day before—and for a dream!"

"I can advise nothing but a composing draught at night."

"I wish you had seen her when she told me her story. She certainly has no idea but that she will be dead by this time to-morrow."

He spoke with excitement, and I gave a little shiver as I heard the words.

"And I have no idea," I said, rather crossly, "of putting any faith in dreams at this time of day. Miss Heathcote will not die an hour sooner because she dreamt she was lying in her coffin."

"But her firm persuasion that she *will*, perhaps shows a—a—*nervous* state of mind," he said, hesitatingly.

"I will observe her closely. But it is all of a piece—one thing after another, and no inconsistency between any of them. I did all in my power. I spoke to Sir Marmaduke as well as to you about the marriage being deferred."

"I am sure that was very good of you," he said, drily.

"I did what I thought was right, and I hope no one will repent not having followed my advice."

The few guests that were expected arrived in due time. The bride showed herself in the evening, and if she appeared silent and distant, those are qualities that are rather to be expected in a bride. Her eyes were radiant, and a soft, delicate colour was in her cheeks.

Mr. Fairfax seemed relieved, but whether only because she did not attract observation for the present moment, or that his mind was easier about herself, I could not tell.

And so we all went to bed the night before the wedding.

The next day was one of those indescribably beautiful days that, even in the midst of a beautiful summer, take you by surprise; that seem to have an individuality of their own from their mere freshness and sweetness; days that make an impression on the mind not easily forgotten.

I must confess that I had slept very little during the night. My mind was too vividly awake with the thought of the morrow for sleep to be possible. It was absurd how her dream had affected me. I seemed to *see* her there, before my physical eyes, lying beautiful and dead in her coffin, in her white marriage robe, and covered with white flowers. I told myself over and over again that the wedding would take place, just like other weddings. She

would be married, and she would go away with her husband, and then all this worry would be over. And if I was left with an unsatisfied curiosity I should soon forget it in other things, instead of being able to think of nothing else in this detestably ridiculous manner. And yet, though I told myself this over and over again, I had a presentiment that it would not be the case, and that something unforeseen *would* happen.

However, we all breakfasted as usual, and Miss Fairfax communicated to her friends that dear Florence seemed very well, and was taking some coffee. The six bridesmaids had of course come to Lowlands to sleep the previous night, and the breakfast was as gay as it could be. Mr. Fairfax, equally of course, had gone home, and I wondered, with sincere pity, how he was feeling, and what he was thinking.

When the time for starting came, we all left in various carriages for the church. Not a glimpse of the bride had anyone had up to this time, except, of course, the bridesmaids, who were privileged to enter her rooms. I expected every moment that something would happen—that Miss Heathcote would perhaps suddenly disappear, and that the next thing to be done would be to drag the ponds. But, instead of that, all went smoothly, and in the most commonplace way, till the vehicles in which the guests were deposited had left the house; I finding myself in one of them, with Miss Mackenzie and old General Scofield.

The drive was in length about half a mile, and a very few minutes placed me among those waiting in the church to receive the bride and her father. In a very few more I heard their carriage drive up. There had certainly been no unusual or unnecessary delay here. And then they entered the church just as any other bride and her father might do. Sir Marmaduke, tall, thin, and erect, looked remarkably well as he escorted his daughter up the nave—and what a vision of beauty she was!

Accustomed as I was to her loveliness, it took me by surprise. The white wreath, the flowing, transparent veil, the shining white robes, had an aërial look about them, and gave somehow an angelic, unearthly character to her beauty. She looked too radiant for earth, yet the radiance, though exquisite in its beauty, was scarcely either joyful or bridelike. There was neither expectancy nor hope in it. There was no love. Her eyes were "*not* the eyes of a bride whom delight makes afraid;" and whether I would or not, her dream returned to me, and those words rang in my ear—

"But fate is the name of her, and his name is Death."

Mr. Fairfax, of course, had been in his place for some time. He was pale, and vainly endeavouring to preserve his usual languid insouciance of demeanour. His anxious eyes sought her face as she entered, and then turned on me with something almost like triumph in them.

Had he not reason for triumph? She had come—he was there—any uneasy doubts as to what *might* be, were satisfied. A few minutes more and she will be his own. She took her place before the altar, her lover by her side, and the service commenced.

What a fool I had been, with all my fear! How much worry and anxiety I might have spared myself!

The clergyman began, "Dearly Beloved." This parson happened to have a high, rather shrill voice; and I thought his way of reading the opening address very disagreeable. He got through it, however, with the solemn appeal at the end for any person who knew any reason why the marriage should not take place to speak then or else hereafter for ever hold his peace.

Suddenly the idea flashed across me that I ought to speak. Suppose I now stepped forward, and declared that I knew a reason to stop the vows that had not yet been uttered, and so myself fulfilled my own presentiment. But, even while I thought this, the shrill, high voice had got beyond me, and was making a similar appeal to bride and bridegroom.

Will she speak where I was silent, I asked myself; but not a sound interrupted the shrill, high voice, which preached on to the question, "Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife?" and I was breathing freely, knowing that there was nothing further now to disquiet myself about, and that smoothly as matters had flowed till this moment, so smoothly would they continue to flow till the end—when there was a sudden sound outside the church door—a sudden, violent sound like the rushing gallop of a runaway horse brought in one instant to a standstill. The door was flung open—a man—madman, no doubt—covered with dust, flushed and desperate, ran up the nave, shouting out, "Stop, Stop, STOP, in the name of God!"

There sounded no irreverence in the Holy Name thus spoken. The man did not look mad, neither was his speech that of a madman. Young, tall, dark, handsome — a manly, noble-looking fellow. Surely, I had seen him before?

There was no time for thought. The clergyman stopped reading—the bridesmaids were scattered—the bride and bridegroom turned round, and then came the supreme moment.

"Floss!" cried the man, and he held his arms open.

"Charlie! Charlie!" in faint tones, yet full of passionate joy, came from her lips, as she flung herself into the arms extended to receive her.

He held her, with her white marriage dress floating about her, close to his heart; the orange flowers, worn for another, were crushed against his breast. Will anyone who saw it ever forget the tenderness in that young man's face as he looked down on hers—tears falling out of his eyes, and he just murmuring, "Floss, Floss?"

She had fainted away. What was to be done? Her father, I suppose, must take her, and Mr. Fairfax would probably be the

person who would have to kick *him* out of the church. Only, he had not the least idea of agreeing to either one or the other arrangements. Possession is nine points of the law. He was not going to give her up, neither was he going to be kicked out of the church by anyone.

Mr. Fairfax walked up to him, and in a low, fierce whisper demanded: "What does this mean?"

The man looked at him, tears still dropping from his eyes, his handsome face ablaze with joy and love.

"She is my wife!" That was all he said.

There was a little expectant pause and hush in the church.

"He is mad!" cried Sir Marmaduke; but Fairfax shook his head. He saw, and everybody saw, that he was not mad. The clergyman was a fool, and said, in his high, shrill voice, "Hadn't we better go on?"

Go on, when the bride had flung herself into another man's arms, who said she was his wife, while he held her fainting form! Mr. Fairfax behaved uncommonly well. It is a trite remark at weddings that "the bridegroom behaved very well;" but never was bridegroom more tried or behaved better under trial than he did.

He turned at once to Sir Marmaduke and Miss Mackenzie.

"She is ill," he said. "Sir," to the man, "these are her father and aunt; let them take her into the vestry; you and I have nothing to do at this moment but think of her health. Give her to her father."

"She is my wife," said the young man, and he carried her into the vestry as if she had been an infant in his arms, and with all the gentle tenderness of a mother to her babe.

We followed him—Sir Marmaduke, Mr. Fairfax, Miss Mackenzie, and I. I do not know whether they were surprised at my coming in, but I felt that I might be wanted.

I could see in Mr. Fairfax's face that he had no doubt of the truth of the story. I could see that he believed the man was his bride's husband. Whether he had in any way accounted to himself for her conduct I could not tell, but that he knew he had lost her I could see. And this knowledge made him defiant.

She was laid on a bench in the vestry, and as she lay there with her bridal robes and flower-crowned head, and her eyes closed, and her face white and soulless, as if dead, I thought of her dream, and shivered. I looked at Mr. Fairfax, and I knew he thought of it also.

She opened her eyes, and smiled up into Charlie's face. "Yes, it *is* heaven," she said; "I *am* dead. That was the sign."

And she looked bright, smiling at Mr. Fairfax, and then directed his attention to her husband by a radiant glance. But now Sir Marmaduke Heathcote had recovered himself enough to interfere. He came quickly in between his daughter and the strange man. He spoke with much emotion. I do not think I ever had seen him show so much.

"We are disgraced for ever, Florence!" he said. "We can never lift our heads again! *What* does it mean? Have I no longer a daughter?"

Florence shrank from him, even as she lay there, with a trembling fear on her like one in actual physical pain. Ah! she need not have been afraid. She need never fear any one more. She had one by her side who had sworn to cherish and protect her, and who meant to do it.

"We were very wrong," he said simply, stepping in between the girl and her father; "but it was all my fault. She was almost a child—and, indeed, I was little more than a boy. Of course, we would not do it now. But then I thought it was the only thing we *could* do. Of course, I was wrong."

"But why did she agree to marry me?" asked Mr. Fairfax quietly.

He turned to her with that sweet, protecting tenderness of his.

"Why did you, Floss?" he said, as if it was the simplest thing in the world he was questioning about, and of course she had done right and could explain herself; but finding she did not do so, he instantly found a reason for her. "Did you think I was dead?" he asked easily, and she murmured, "Yes, yes," and closed her eyes as if half dying herself over the dreadful idea.

"She thought I was dead, you see," said Charlie, quite pleasantly, to Mr. Fairfax. "That explains it. Now don't you think it would save a deal of bother if she just changed her dress, and she and I went away together?"

His eyes had a brilliant smile in them, and his voice trembled a little for joy, as he made the proposal.

"You are more likely to leave this under an escort of police, young man," said Sir Marmaduke. "I don't believe one word of your story."

"Let us take the matter quietly," Mr. Fairfax suggested, "and make the esclandre"—with a sigh—"as little as we can. Of course, proofs must be produced."

"I believe there is no doubt about it," said I; "I met them myself."

Charlie wheeled round, and stared at me; then burst out into a laugh, which he quickly checked.

"Why, doctor, is it you?" he cried. "What luck! Yes, indeed, this gentleman did meet us in Guernsey shortly after we were married, and attended me for an accident. There is not a doubt of it."

Sir Marmaduke and Mr. Fairfax both turned.

"You have known it, and kept it from us," cried the first in a rage. "It was *base*."

And Mr. Fairfax said: with withering contempt: "I did think you were a gentleman."

I wonder whether I ought to have told?

Of course, Charlie had his proofs, and produced them, and it was

a great help to him in craving pardon, and being allowed to take possession of his wife (I wonder who could have prevented him?) that he turned out to be a baronet, and the possessor of a large fortune and fine estates. He was the very heir to the baronetcy that had been advertised for in all the papers some months before, and buried in the wilds of Australia, an old paper happened to come in his way, that contained at once the advertisement for himself, and a notice that "a marriage had been arranged" between his wife and Mr. Fairfax. Each had believed the other to be dead, and hence his selling out and seeking his fortune in Australia, and her reluctant consent to marry another.

When the gay young officer persuaded Floss to run away with him from the French school, he had no prospect of the baronetcy. The foolish children had not enough to live on between them. They married in the holidays. Floss had cleverly persuaded the principals of her school that she was passing the time with her aunt in Guernsey. Of course it was all very wrong, but Charlie had simply bewitched her. Then she returned to school and he to his regiment, and by-and-bye, when he had made his fortune by crowning himself with glory, the marriage would be recognised by a delighted father-in-law.

But the course of true love ran very roughly. Charlie's regiment was ordered to Africa, and he took part in many campaigns, fought the Queen's battles, and lay wounded in her Majesty's hospitals without any Floss to nurse him, or the advantage of any medical attendance.

Then came the false report of her death, and he took his ruined life to Australia. The ship was wrecked, and his name given in among those on board who were lost, and he never cared to contradict the report. It was on reading the account of the wreck of the Achilles in the *Times* that Florence fainted, and afterwards had the fever, from which she arose careless of what became of her, and submitting to her father's wishes because she had not energy enough to resist them.

I think I have now explained everything to the satisfaction of everybody, except that Charlie came by that wound for which I attended him from his own carelessness in handling a pistol, and only made a mystery of it that Floss might not be alarmed.

I hope I shall not be accused of advocating runaway marriages when I add that after they were forgiven and all the fuss over, Charlie and Floss were as happy as the day is long, and that I have the highest opinions of them both.

Heathcote made friends with me again, and we shook hands; but Mr. Fairfax never quite forgave me. And now, what I want to know is, whether I ought to have betrayed Floss?

SCOUTS' PROPERTY.

IT would be an interesting investigation, for one who had the leisure or the curiosity, to trace the history of certain articles which exist on a College staircase, belong periodically to the Scout, and are sold, again and again, to successive undergraduates. When a man goes down from the University he can hardly include among his luggage such articles as a coal-scuttle or a slop-pail; and they and a host of similar valuables become the perquisite of the Scout. Consequently, that personage has always a large and miscellaneous assortment on hand wherewith to inveigle the unwary fresher. Caps, gowns, and B.A. hoods; lamps, kettles and saucepans; slop-pails and baths, coal-scuttles and coffee-pots are leased out, so to speak, by their owner, the Scout; and the lease falls in every year or so, when the articles revert to their original owner and are then leased out afresh.

In the course of their precarious career what a number of hands—and how different the hands—they must pass through! What histories they must have, some of them!

Take one of those battered old lamps, for instance. What wild orgies it has lighted; what jovial choruses it has listened to; what mad merriment it has witnessed; what wholesale consumption of preserved fruits, logwood port, brandied sherry and gooseberry champagne it has connived at; what reckless profusion and wanton destruction it has watched with its steady glare! Or perhaps it has been the solitary companion, *solus cum solo*, of the overtasked student, consuming health, eyesight, capacity for enjoyment along with the midnight oil. They could tell queer tales, some of those old lamps, if they got the power of speech. And I wonder how many globes and funnels they get through in the course of their career.

There was my copper kettle now. When I went up to Oxford I was resolved to spend my money judiciously, and had resolved upon a block tin kettle. But my Scout, a venerable gentleman, who subsequently left eight thousand pounds behind him when he died, said no! A copper kettle would be dearer at first but far the cheaper in the end. Let him choose one; he knew where he could get a first-rate article, perfectly new, for sixteen and sixpence, and I should not repent the investment. Why the bottom would almost go out of one of those tin things if you dabbed them down hard. Overcome by the logic of experience I acceded, and the kettle, bright and beautiful as a winter sunset, was my own.

It was a splendid article. There was a sangfroid about it, a coolness of disposition which prevented it from boiling, on any provoca-

tion, at less than half-an-hour. On a cold night, if I came in late, it would sit the fire out without the slightest sign of emotion—not even a breath of steam. It stuck its spout up in a sort of arrogant way that said, as plainly as in words, "Make me boil if you can; I defy you." If, however, I piled up the fire and made my room like a cucumber-frame, it would condescend to get up steam. When it did boil, it did nothing by halves. It sent out a mighty roar of steam; then it discharged jets of water into the fender and rusted the fire-irons; then it suddenly fell over on one side, emptied half of its contents through the lid, and sent a shower of ashes over my legs.

It was a bran new kettle, as I have said, and this makes it the more odd that, after three weeks, it leaked. It usually sat, when off duty, in the coal-scuttle; and I was not pleased one evening to find the coal-scuttle full of water and the kettle empty. My Scout said it was quite incomprehensible, and took it to be mended. I had a short respite from it, and then it came back. It immediately broke out in a fresh place. It was mended again, but it went on at the same game. By the time I had suffered from it for two years it was another kettle. Human beings, they say, are renewed every seven years; college kettles, apparently, every two.

It took up a lot of room, too. Put it on the fire, and nothing else was visible; neither could you feel any warmth. It was an uneasy concern; it never seemed to fit the coals. It was always lolling to one side or the other; or it stuck its spout in the air and the water came out at the lid; or it tumbled forwards on its face and dribbled into the fender. On one occasion I was reading late into the night, or rather into the morning. The book was "Mill's Logic;" and delighted at suddenly understanding what I had been studying for an hour and a half, I kicked up my leg, hit the kettle's spout, and got a bath of scalding water over my foot. I danced round the room in agony, while the kettle leant forward and spouted with derision. It was two in the morning, too late to send out for oil and cotton-wool, and there was no one up who could assist me. I had more respect for my brazen-fronted adversary after that.

At last I resolved to get rid of it. One dark night, when all, save a few, were asleep, I stole like a thief round the silent quad, starting (at the College cat) like a guilty thing, and carrying my copper tyrant in my hand. Into the back quad I went, and pitched the monster quietly into the street. Then, with a sneaking triumph, I returned to my rooms and laughed to think that it was gone. I got a tin one and was happy.

Just at the end of term the freshman from the attic above me came down and borrowed my kettle, remarking that his leaked.

"It's very odd too," said he, "for it's a new one—a copper one, and I haven't had it more than a month."

"Very odd," said I, "they will do it. I'll come and have a look at it."

I went. There it was, in the old attitude, sticking up its spout out of the coal-box. The coals were damp as they were wont to be. I picked it up and examined the bottom. Could I mistake those scars and patches? It was my old enemy, doubtless picked up by the Scout, and sold, as a great bargain, to the guileless fresher.

When I went down it was still in College. It is there now, I have no doubt, for it has the gift of eternal youth and is always renewing itself. And that Scout has made his fortune.

So much for hardware. Turning to articles of personal adornment, I have a vivid recollection of Jones's cap and gown. When Jones came up he was instructed to be very economical; which instructions he acted on for the first fortnight, as most of us do.

"Where can you get a cap and gown, sir?" says the Scout. "Well, sir, you can get them at Foster's or Standen's by paying the price. But I happen to have very good second-hand ones that will just about fit you, sir. Better have them than go to the robe-makers."

Jones listened to the voice of the charmer, and got the Academicals in question—for a few shillings more than they would have cost new. The gown was too tight—he was a Scholar, and it was decidedly too short. But then the cap was too big, so that made things equal. It was a rare cap—happily. It either fell rakishly over one ear; or it tumbled on to his nose, as though he were trying to disguise himself; or it rollicked on the back of his head, as though he had sat too long at a wine party. It was not good for throwing at anybody else, for it always took a bias and went in an unexpected direction. Having broken a lamp and two or three picture-glasses, Jones gave up using it indoors. One day he took a shot at a man standing under the Sub-Warden's window. It missed the man, but it rose like a bird and went through the window. Jones fled in horror, slipped out through the back gates, and bought a new one. As the spectacle of a new cap might excite suspicion, he broke the board in two, and cut the cloth off the corners. The Sub-Warden stood at the chapel door next morning, and watched the men go in. He did not stop Jones as being the owner of the cap that had come through his window, but he called Jones up and said:

"You have a most disgraceful cap, sir. It is the cap of a drunken and disorderly man, sir. Please appear in a decent one in future."

Poor Jones had plenty of animal spirits, but was a teetotaler!

Now take articles of vertu. There was a pair of bronze candle-sticks which I bought from the Scout when I went up. They were very beautiful; but beauty is fragile. It was hardly safe to move them, they were so susceptible of dissolution. I have seen one of them in as many as three pieces at once. The sockets, being connected with the main body by a very slim and elegant stem, were wont to collapse, candle and all, and put one's heart in one's mouth. Each stood on three feet, or rather, each leant, for they resolutely

declined to maintain the perpendicular. They were bronze; which made it strange that so much of them was black sealing-wax. They went through so many vicissitudes and caused me so much innocent excitement, that I was sorry to leave them. When I had them they were pretty much of a height, so far as one could guess; but when I left them, one had grown, by repeated absorption of sealing-wax into the system, a head taller than the other. I wonder what their relative sizes are now.

The extraordinary thing about this leasehold property is its wonderful vitality and recuperative power. Like the phœnix, it springs into renewed life from its own ashes. Of course an exception must be made in the case of crockery and glasses, which, indeed, have but a brief span of existence. But in spite of the severest usage, most of the Scout's stock-in-trade remains in use with wonderful pertinacity; so much so, that an instance of actual dissolution causes a shock of surprise to those acquainted with the subject. I well remember my feelings when I saw, propped up in the porter's lodge, a sponge bath, with the mournful legend on its battered adverse, "Not worth repairing." It is true that it belonged to a Don who had been many years in College, and perhaps had been the property of a dozen men before, but it was the only instance in my experience, and impressed me accordingly. Otherwise, most articles on a College staircase would seem to have permeated themselves with the elixir of life, and to maintain themselves in existence, at once a trap to the unwary undergraduate, and a perpetual source of profit to the Scout.

ASHES TO ASHES.

"JUST a few trifles—mere rubbish," I said, peeping over Hilda's shoulder into the drawer. Hilda gave one glance and then went on with her work; while I leant idly against the old bureau looking at Hilda's reflection in the convex mirror above us, with the gilt eagle dangling chains and balls from its beak, perched on the top.

Half a shutter near us was open and the only sunshine admitted into the house of mourning streamed in right on Hilda's little head of sunny hair, and her slim white hands as they deftly sorted, folded, tied and labelled packet after packet from the pile of papers before her. It caught a blue jar with a peacock's feather in it in the green gloom beyond her, and shone full into the face of the dead master of the house, smiling sedately from his picture frame at his sweet, demure wife on the opposite wall.

I had done my share of the work, so I drew out the drawer—a long shallow one for loose papers at the top of the old-fashioned escritoire: we had not noticed it at first—and sat down with it on my lap in the big, shabby leather arm-chair, sacred till now to Uncle John's own special use.

Odds and ends, such as seemingly grow up of themselves in unused corners. A key, a whistle made of an elder twig, some sweet-smelling berries strung into a bracelet with a garnet bead between, and a common little red purse with portraits of the Queen and Prince Albert on the back. Utter trash.

"This is the last drawer," said Hilda presently. "I think we have done everything now; but go over it all again, Dora, please."

I thought carefully for a moment, recalling, as well as I could, that grey dawning (how many days ago, I wondered) when the dear kind voice that I loved so well spoke its last words to me:

"Dorothy, dear, as soon as you reasonably can after my death, take this key that opens the four little drawers in my bureau. It is all yours. Everything I have is left to your mother and you two. What you find in the top drawer, put into my coffin. I should like to take the poor trifles with me, as far as I can. Then there are private letters; read and destroy at your discretion. They are tied with green ribbon. The business letters, tied with red tape, are all in the right-hand drawers. Keep them to assist Mortley in winding up affairs. God bless you, Dorothy. Marry some good man who will take care of you—but don't expect to be all the world to him. The best of women never was that yet to the best of husbands."

What made him say that, I wondered.

He seemed too tired for more speaking. Hilda came in to take my place as nurse, and I never saw him alive again.

In the uppermost left-hand drawer we had found a pile of yellow letters directed in a neat, sloping Italian hand to my uncle, and indorsed in his square black writing, "From my dear wife;" and another package, older and yellower, tied with faded blue ribbon, "From Anne Pelham, during our engagement." They lay on a piece of soft muslin, easily recognisable as the large handkerchief that covered Aunt Anne's pretty shoulders in her portrait, above the low bodice of her crimsom satin dress. The original of the little hair broach with the pearl setting was pinned to it. We folded the letters in the limp discoloured muslin, fastened them with the tiny brooch, and laid them reverently at the dead man's right hand in his coffin.

The rest had been a long day's work, but all was now finished.

"You are tired, Dora darling," said Hilda. "I will run home and see mother, and stay if she wants me. Get Mercy to bring you some tea, and I'll come back when I can."

Our mother, Mrs. Dorward, lived in a little crooked cottage, all red-tiled roof and chimney-stacks, some little way down High Street, the one street of Fairdale. She was partially paralysed, and one of us had always to stay with her while the other acted as companion, and, lately, as nurse to Uncle John. He was head of the firm of Mallowdale and Mortley, solicitors, and the offices occupied the ground floor of the big red house that stood without intervening railing or area on the High Street pavement.

Uncle John had often begged my mother to take up her abode with him, but she had grown used to her own house and her own ways, and change was a pain and weariness to her.

"Hilda!" I exclaimed, suddenly pricked as one sometimes is by an extravagant fancy in moments of sadness. "Have we made a mistake? Is this the drawer he meant?"

"Oh, Dora!" said Hilda, with a world of quiet reproof in her eyes. "When you know all my aunt was to him! The best-loved woman that ever lived."

"I didn't think," I stammered in my confusion, slipping the bracelet over my wrist. "What is the key?"

"A duplicate one of the bureau," suggested Hilda, and she was right. "And the whistle is what he used to make for us children." I slipped the purse, empty, into my pocket, and replaced the drawer. Hilda glided away, and old Mercy appeared with a tray, as she did half a dozen times a day, feeding being inseparably connected with bereavement in the ideas of her class.

"Do keep up and eat something, Miss Dorothy, dear," ran her well known formula.

I complied. "Sit down and rest, Mercy," I said, for I was glad of the old woman's company. "And tell me, did you know my aunt when she was Miss Pelham?"

"Of course I did! I remember as if it was yesterday. The big house by the post office being done up, and the new brass plate on

the little green gate, 'Messrs. Parker and Pelham, Surgeons.' And when I was told that the new doctor—old Mr. Parker's nephew from Lon'on, he was—had got one daughter, a regular beauty, I says directly: 'She'll just do for our Master John!' And next Sunday there he was a-carrying her prayer-book home from church, like as if it were fate; and a lovely couple they made: and a church steeple and two lovers in the bottom of my tea-cup that very same evening, as sure as you're alive, Miss Dorothy!"

"So it was love at first sight, Mercy?"

"Well, may be so. Everything was so suitable. Dr. Pelham had money and got all the county practice at once; and Master John's father and mother they wanted to see him settled with someone they knew; and the young lady wasn't likely ever to have met a finer young man anywhere than our Master John. And so it all came about quite providential-like."

"And they lived happy ever after." I ended the story for her, making a stray sunbeam dance on my teaspoon.

"Aye, that they did. Never a crooked word or a cross look between them that ever *I* see. And I lived with them married for thirty year, and with him mourning her faithful for ten—so I ought to know."

Mercy trotted away briskly with her tray, and I sat musing. Sweet garden sounds and scents stole in through the half-open window. A big bee, all yellow from the lily bed, boomed sleepily in and out again; Mercy's big white cat was sunning herself on the top of the red-brick front wall, and the chaffinches in the pear tree, who knew right well that she was too old and fat for bird-catching, were only pretending to be in a flutter at her neighbourhood.

I felt at odds with the calm sunlit peacefulness, and Mercy's story, which seemed to belong to it, left the vague burden on my spirits heavier.

A calm, prosperous life; mapped out by one's parents. A wife who loved her husband because he was the first comer. An existence bounded by the narrow limits of Fairdale society. A steadily increasing business and income, of little profit to a childless pair. Was it worth the pain of dying—was it worth the pain of living to have passed through this?

> "No midday shade, no clouded sun,
> But sacred, high, eternal noon,"

kept ringing in my head—a hymn of my childhood that always inspired me with doleful apprehensions respecting my future enjoyment of Heaven, supposing I did get there.

"Is that to be our life—here—on earth, I mean? We shall be comfortable beyond belief. Mother can have a big subscription at Mudie's, and try every new device in fancy work that the mind of man has invented. I shall go shopping at St. Bride's with a heavy

purse and a light conscience. All our dear little makeshifts and contrivances are at an end. Hilda will marry the curate and reign at the rectory some day, and visit at the dean's and all the county families ——" I dropped an angry tear, and, ashamed of myself, closed the shutter and left the room, crossing softly the wide landing and entering the darkened chamber where the dead man lay in the stillness.

I gazed at his face; noble and stern in repose.

"You look strong enough to have made your life for yourself, not to have accepted it from the hands of others," I thought. "Good-bye, good-bye." I laid my hand gently on the cold forehead. As I did so, the worn string of the bracelet gave way and the beads slid from my wrist into the coffin. I could not regain them without disturbing the dead, and, horror-struck, as at a sacrilege, I fled away. Next day was the funeral.

Hilda and I wished to go to see the last of our kinsman, but we found that the old-world views of Fairdale society were against the proposition, so we gave up the idea.

Everything was done in strict obedience to precedent to the gratification of Mercy and Fairdale's opinion. We watched the gloomy procession forming, from behind the closed shutters.

"Look at that woman by the steps, Hilda. Who can she be?"

"Some casual passer-by. It is not a Fairdale face. Ah! there is the coffin with our wreath of white roses. I do hope the people here won't think it popish."

"She is sobbing so pitifully! I wonder if it is anybody he has been kind to?"

"There is Sir John Hartley's carriage—yes, and the Crossholme carriage, and I believe the earl is there himself—how very gratifying. Dear uncle! he deserved all the respect that could be shown him. Your woman, Dora? Oh, I dare say she has had some recent loss. She was in mourning, wasn't she?"

"She did not follow them—she went down the Crossholme road."

In the afternoon I could bear the closed house no longer.

"Come to the churchyard, Hilda. No one will see us to be scandalised."

The Mallowdales had a vault under the raised chancel of the irregularly-built old church. The entrance was already bricked up, and on a projection of the stone-work hung a memorial wreath. Hilda looked at the tawdry white flowers and brilliant green tin leaves with much disfavour.

"I didn't think such a horrid thing was to be bought in Fairdale," she said. "It must have come from St. Bride's—sent as an advertisement by some of those new shops—rubbishy thing!"

"Leave it there, Hilda. It may have been meant in kindness."

Hilda turned homewards.

"Let me stay longer," I pleaded. "I will just go through the copse as far as the Crossholme road. I am pining for air and sunshine."

So I crossed the churchyard, and lingered a few moments in the golden corn fields beyond. Then over the stile and down the dry sandy path I plunged into the warm green shade of the fir trees. It was a little-frequented path. I was almost startled to hear a child's voice crying, and to see—a few paces in advance—a tall woman in black sitting on a fallen tree. She rose before I reached her and moved wearily on, trying to quiet the little child in her arms.

"She is young—she is old—quite old. Not a Fairdale person. She doesn't walk like a countrywoman. She isn't a tramp from St. Bride's." So I thought as I followed her. She suddenly sat down again, as if dead beat, and began to hush the child. "Hush, hush, Mimi, love. Grannie can't carry you, if you scream so."

"Grannie!" I said to myself in amaze. The little knob of hair behind was grey, certainly: but she wore a fringe, and her dress was youthfully cut, and trimmed with a picturesque sort of frilled tippet about her shoulders.

She looked full at me with her big dark eyes. Curiously attractive eyes, though red-rimmed and swollen. I stopped. Hilda was not at hand to consult as to the propriety of the doing, so I spoke.

"Your baby seems to be troublesome. Can I help you?"

"She is starving with hunger. I never thought I should not be able to buy a drop of milk in this village," she replied; politely slurring over an adjective uncomplimentary to my probable residence. "I never brought anything with me, thinking I should be sure to find shops, or, perhaps, a farmhouse; and now she must wait till I get her to Crossholme."

"To Crossholme!" I exclaimed. "What a journey! And you are taking the longest road."

"Well, it's the quietest," said the stranger, with an odd look. The child, who had been gazing open-mouthed at me, now recommenced her plaining. She was about two years old, very pretty, with eyes like Grannie's, looking through tangled rings of yellow hair. I knew Fairdale well enough to believe the woman's statement.

"I know where to get something," I exclaimed, with sudden recollection. "Wait here for ten minutes," and off I started at a run, back the way I had come. Another path through the corn-field ended in Hobday's Farm, and Mrs. Hobday, kind soul! on hearing half my story, pressed me to help myself to half a gallon from a brimming pail; and then loaded me with a hunch of seed-cake, a slice of sage-cheese and a pocketful of rosy apples. Back I sped to my new acquaintance.

She was still rocking the crying child, whose mouth we stopped effectually with cake and milk, first thing; and then I broke down the bracken and made a little nest where she sat, munching peacefully, while Grannie stretched her tired arms with a sigh of relief.

"She is my daughter's youngest child, and I thought a day out of London and smoke would do her good. We must wait till seven o'clock for our train at Crossholme," said she, wearily.

"You had better rest here, then," I suggested, tossing the apples to Mimi. "This little one is getting drowsy. You can leave the milk-can at the first cottage on the Crossholme road, as you pass."

"How good you have been to us! Thank the lady, Mimi." Mimi kissed the tips of her fingers with an airy little grace, though almost at the same moment her head nodded forward, and the wedge of cake dropped from her other hand. I loosened the ribbons of her big bonnet, and tried to settle her comfortably, while Grannie continued: "And now, please, tell me how much you paid for me?"

I began to explain, but stopped, utterly amazed. She had put her hand in her pocket and drawn out a little red-leather purse, gilded, gilt clasped, with portraits of the Queen and Prince Albert still recognisable on the back; and the hand that held it was braceleted with a string of brown berries and garnet beads!

She tossed it into her lap and drew forth another, a big and useful purse. Then something in my looks struck her.

"I don't suppose *you* ever saw a purse like that. It was bought at St. Bride's, at Bride's Fair, years before *you* were born. The Queen was just married, and they were all the fashion."

I don't know what made me do such a thing, but I drew from my pocket the fellow purse to hers, found in my uncle's old bureau, and held it out to her. She looked at it and then at me, with white cheeks and scared eyes.

"What is it? Do you know me? Are you *his* daughter?"

"I am John Mallowdale's niece. Who are you, and what brings you here?"

"Oh! I have done no harm! I have broken no promise. I felt I must see him once more. John, *my* John!" and she burst into bitter weeping.

After a few moments she grew calmer, and, speaking with a sort of sad dignity that impressed me, said: "You must please listen to all the truth now, or else you will be making guesses, maybe, at a falsehood."

She took up her purse and opened it. There was a pocket in the green silk lining from which she drew a small glazed card, "Mr. John Mallowdale," in print on it, and underneath in my uncle's hand, "With respectful devotion." On the back of the card was scrawled "To-morrow, dearest, at eight," and tied to it was a crumbling scrap of a dried flower.

Then she took my purse and looked in the corresponding pocket. There was a folded paper in it from which a curl of dark-brown hair slipped and uncoiled itself dry and lustreless.

She laughed and unfolded the paper—an old playbill of the "Theatre Royal, Crossholme."

Somebody's Benefit appeared in large capitals, and far down the bill one name in small print was underlined with broad black strokes. "Miss Millicent Tracy." The same name appeared again as singing some song "in character," between the pieces, and again in the last performance. She looked at the worn crumpled little slip tenderly.

"Yes, he stayed to the very end of that stupid little farce to see *me*," she murmured.

"Are you Miss Tracy?" I asked.

"Mrs. de Vesci Trent," she replied. "You have heard of me, I dare say?—No?"—with a look of surprise in her fine eyes—"Well, I have worked my way into some little renown since those dear happy Crossholme days when I was a mere slip of a girl with nothing but bright eyes and a tolerable voice to recommend me."

"Where did Uncle John meet you?"

"At the theatre, of course. I saw him directly, in the stage-box, with a number of other young gentlemen. I had never seen such a bright, handsome country boy's face before, and he looked so interested in all of it! 'Romeo and Juliet,' for Mrs. Delancy's benefit. I was the Count Paris's page, and had plenty of time to look about me. You see, I had never been out of London before. Crossholme was the first town on our provincial circuit. He stayed to the very end of that rubbishy little farce; and next day at rehearsal there he was with old Delancy. That was the manager—my uncle. I lived with him and his wife—good old souls! How they and everybody joked me about my admirer!"

She reseated herself on the tree-stump, her lap filled with the poor relics of her past, her day of youth. A shaft of light athwart the soughing pine boughs struck and broke and danced on her shabby old gown and the aged wrinkled fingers, round one of which she was twining idly the long nut-brown curl of hair. I felt dizzy with the medley of incongruous ideas that she had raised in my mind. Uncle John, a "gay, handsome country boy," whose dead face as I saw it in his coffin still haunted me, grim and silent. Harder still to link memories of love and admiration, songs and dances to the actual sight of the grey old face before me. Her dark eyes flashed suddenly upon me as I mused.

"Don't be afraid of a long story. Mine was short enough. Meetings, compliments, bouquets and a formal proposal at the end of a week. Old Mr. Mallowdale and his wife were away, you see; and that was how Master John came to be all by himself in Crossholme. Do you see that card? It was fastened to the bouquet he threw me one Saturday night. We were to go out together for the Sunday as an engaged couple. Fancy our holiday! A start in a chaise in the early morning, and a long drive through the fresh country lanes to breakfast at a farm-house, and then on to Filby Ness. Do you know it?"

"The pretty headland and bay about ten miles off? Yes."

"Well, think of seeing the sea there for the first time in your life,

with your first sweetheart beside you! We played on the sands like two children, picked shells, repeated all the poetry we knew till we were tired, and then found an elder thicket where we unpacked our picnic hamper. After dinner we set to work seriously to discuss our prospects. We agreed, I remember, that if my beauty, virtue and talents did not melt the hearts of his stern parents, he was to forsake all—actual clerkship and possible partnership—for me, and under my able tuition rise to fame and fortune as an actor, special line to be decided hereafter. The bells were ringing for afternoon service in the little church close by. We went and sat hand-in-hand on a gravestone with our feet in the sweet long grass, and kissed and settled to be married in that church and no other. Oh, what a sweet, silly, sunshiny time! Laugh if you care to at the notion."

"No, no, not for worlds," I exclaimed earnestly. I was strangely interested in this odd woman with her sweet voluble utterance; now checked by a sob, now by a half-cynical laugh. Little Mimi was asleep; her head on my knee.

"My story ended next morning. Delancy received a visit from old Mr. Mallowdale that threw him into a violent passion, and made him weep over me and use bad language about John till I was utterly miserable and scared. After rehearsal he dragged me off to the White Hart and there in the coffee-room was a fierce old gentlemen who said many things that I don't care to repeat. He belonged to a school that didn't hesitate to clothe coarse ideas in strong language when occasion required. I thought of John, and held my ground against him easily enough. John sent me encouraging notes, and appeared night after night pale and stern in his box; but Delancy forbid any nearer meeting.

"Then one day I had a very different visitor; your grandmother, my dear, and a very clever woman she was! Bless you, it makes me laugh and cry now to think how she turned and twisted poor little me round her delicate finger in no time. She appealed to my generosity, my love for John, my pity for her, his broken-hearted mother!

"When I saw her, a real fine lady, I recognised for the first time how great the social distinction between us was. And when I saw her grief, her dignity, her green satinette pelisse and leghorn bonnet with three tall ostrich feathers, all prostrate before me, calling on my magnanimity to save her boy if I loved him, what could a romantic chit like me do but say, Madame I love your son far too well to work him any ill. We part from henceforth, for ever! So she cried and I cried, and she offered me a bracelet and a hundred pounds, and I would take neither (and was sorry for it afterwards). Then she kissed me and blessed me and went away, taking with her a shabby little note of farewell to John and his only present to me of any value, a bracelet. He gave it to replace one of mine, like this, which he had carried off and vowed to keep till death. Ah! where is it now I wonder?"

I knew; but was silent.

"I kept the purse that he had bought me one day for a fairing, and a whistle he cut me in the elder wood. Mimi plays with it now. Delancy's company left Crossholme next week, and three years after I married Barker, our leading low comedian, otherwise de Vesci Trent. We got on pretty happily. He died before I was twenty and I have worked hard for myself and baby ever since. I never heard again from John (though somehow when an unexpected bit of luck fell in my way now and then I fancied his hand was in it) till, nine years ago, one cold wintry day, his name was announced, and a grey-headed gentleman, very like the one who frightened me so many years ago at the White Hart, walked in."

"The year of Aunt Anne's death!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, He was free, so was I, and he had come to make me his wife, if I would."

"You refused!"

"Ah! child! child! What had he or I in common with the boy and girl who made love among the daisies and buttercups at Filby? Our lives had grown too far apart to meet now without a strain. Then we were boy and girl with our future to make together. Now we were old man and woman bearing each the burden of a past. A struggling actress with a troop of grandchildren. A prosperous, intensely-respectable country solicitor. Absurd, on the face of it! I am glad to think that I was the first to see it. So we said 'Good-bye,' and wished each other 'God speed' on our separate ways."

"Poor Uncle John!" I sighed.

"Why poor?" returned she, sharply. "He dined with me, and was introduced to my daughter and her husband, and departed; giving thanks for having honourably satisfied his conscience without incurring any disagreeable consequences."

"Mimi is waking. I must go," I said.

"Good-bye. You will never see me again, but I am glad we have met. I wonder if you will think of me as the blessing or curse of John Mallowdale's life? I wish I knew which I have been! Good-bye, good-bye!"

She rose, and taking little Mimi in her arms with a sweet, sad smile and gracious bow, turned from me and stepped briskly away down the shady wood-path. I would have followed and borne her company on her way, but I saw her lay her face against the child's and guessed that she was crying bitterly.

Truly some women are riddles—and men too. To think of Uncle John—but I *don't* think of it, if I can help. It will be my one secret from Hilda and mother. I had placed the purse in Mimi's little sash, where Grannie might find it, and the poor little berries—his sweetheart's keepsake—lie in the dead man's coffin. Perhaps that *was* what he asked for, after all.

BY THE SALT SEA WAVES.

CAPTAIN EDWARD BARTON was very fond of lounging in the large window of his sea-side lodgings after breakfast, and watching the girls go down to bathe; and by the time they had had their dip, and were walking or sitting in the sun to dry their hair, the gallant officer was amongst them. Captain Barton was not to be caught with chaff, though; he knew pretty well whose hair was Nature's gift, and whose had been carefully taken in its owner's fair hand and shaken in a pail inside the bathing machine "to make it match the rest."

There were two girls to whom no exception could be taken. Their cheeks had a healthy bloom, their eyes sparkled with youth and merriment, and their hair—that of one was brown, and the other golden—grew out of their own heads; and as our Captain passed them a delicious salt smell hung about the dishevelled locks that was quite inspiring. He was just ruminating to himself as to whether blue eyes or brown were best, when a voice with a rich oily brogue attached to it arose behind.

"Don't be cutting me, now, Barton! But sure, ye've got some excuse for blindness after staring at that girl's wicked eye so long!" For a refined, polished young man like Captain Barton to be thus assailed was most aggravating; but having satisfied himself that no one else heard the remark, he greeted this vociferous brother-officer civilly.

"I've run down for a dip," pursued Captain O'More, genially; "and I never saw a prettier couple of girls than those I saw ye looking at! Do ye know them at all?"

"Not in the least. Impossible for a man to know all the girls he sees at a sea-side place."

"Och, then," said O'More, looking back after the girlish figures which were now arranged on either side of a stout old lady, "I'd go out of my way to have a few minutes' conversation with the two of them."

"Sorry I can't introduce you. Have a cigar?"

"Not just now. Have they bathed yet, do ye know?"

"Why, man," cried Barton, laughing, "how should I know?"

"Ye might have seen them. But I think they have, for their hair's all wet. Will you dine with me to-night at the 'Bear'?"

"Thanks—yes," said Barton. "Where are you off to now?"

"To enjoy myself—and find a way of knowing those girls."

"Impossible!"

"To a stolid Englishman like you, yes; but where there's a beauty

in the case, leave an Irishman alone! I bet you a guinea I get acquainted with them this very day."

"Absurd! I'll take you at once, O'More."

During the very hot afternoon the two young beauties and the stout old lady went busily in search of live curiosities for their aquarium. Captain O'More kept an eye on them as they strolled amongst the rocks below, while he was on the cliff above. At last he saw the old lady sit down on a sheltered bit of sand, quite exhausted with the heat; and then he went down amongst the little pools and rocks. Fervently and earnestly he groped in every hole as if aquariums were his livelihood. At last, by a rare stroke of fortune, he found something (he did not know its name) that drew the eyes of the two beautiful young ladies enviously towards him.

"He's *got* it! and we shan't find another, I know!" murmured one disappointed fair to the other.

Quick as thought, the Irishman secured what he knew now to be a prize, in his pocket-handkerchief, and then sauntered on. The girls approached the old lady, and he saw the three were eagerly watching him. He pretended to have met with further success, and stooped as if to secure another treasure. Then he saw the old lady ambling towards him, a sort of dumb apology breaking in every gesture.

"Pardon me, sir," she commenced, "but we have for days been disappointed in obtaining an addition to our aquarium—*would* you allow me to see if you have secured what we have failed in finding?"

O'More lifted his hat with most retiring grace, undid his handkerchief and listened rapturously as the lady excitedly cried:

"Beautiful creature! Bertha, Winifred, the very one you are looking for!"

Then O'More's hat was raised once more respectfully, and he had entreated the acceptance of the jelly-like substance he was secretly longing to get rid of.

"Oh! no," said brown-haired Bertha. "It wouldn't be fair—would it, Winnie?"

"No," murmured Winnie, looking softly up. "We thought you had *two*."

"Pray, madam, oblige me by accepting it for your daughters," said the cunning Irishman, still besieging "mamma"—and somehow or other, when the treasure was transferred, he followed up his opportunity by offering his card and begging to be allowed to send them some other very fine specimens the following day.

The card was respectable—and moreover—the mother of the girls knew some O'Mores; and Captain O'More declared(!) that the people she knew were his cousins; and then with an assumption of that assurance which emanates from the Emerald Isle in rich profusion, he went back through the town beside Mrs. Graham. Captain Barton met him walking with expanded chest, and beaming

smiles; and could scarcely believe his eyes when his successful friend calmly nodded and slightly winked at him!

"I'll take my guinea now, Barton; it will pay for the champagne," said he, when he joined the captain.

"There you are. Perhaps you'll introduce *me* now?"

"With pleasure, my boy—but first we will dine, and then we can go out to listen to the band and so on."

A capital collection of "things" for aquariums was purchased forth with and sent to Mrs. Graham; and now every day the old lady's work was cut out, for Captain O'More was always in attendance on Bertha while Captain Barton payed unmistakable attention to Winifred. It was painful to witness the chaperone's efforts to see what was going on before and behind her. She was just meditating on securing her daughters to two long chains of her châtelaine when Captain O'More proposed and was accepted; and no doubt her efforts in the other direction might have happily relaxed but that on the very day when such *very* decided proofs of hopeless adoration were visible in Captain Barton's face, something happened—right in front of all the people who had been watching the affair for days, too!

"*Dear* Ned, I *am* so glad!" cried a gushing voice; and Captain Barton turned with a slightly heightened colour to greet a fashionably-dressed girl, who continued to run on. "Do come and take me out; it is so fearfully dull in the hotel, and mamma can't stir in the sun, you know." And he raised his hat politely to the Grahams, and Winifred saw "that girl" take his arm and march him off as if he were her property!

Later in the day a dowager asked Mrs. Graham if she had seen that "lovely Mrs. Barton?"

The British matron's ire was roused; but no signs appeared to show the vexation felt, as Mrs. Graham coolly enquired:

"*What* Mrs. Barton?"

"Captain Barton's wife—you saw her this morning, you know."

The moon was shining over the restless little ripples that broke on the rocks that night; and many lovers were wandering in their fool's paradise. But two that we know of were not.

"Where's Winnie—and Barton?" demanded O'More of his future mother-in-law, as she grimly sat out the watch the lovers were keeping.

"Winnie is at home—and your friend, I presume, is where he ought to have been long ago, with his wife!"

"It is his *wife* ye say?" hotly enquired the Irishman. "By jabers, Mrs. Graham, I'm not the man at all at all to hear my best friend slandered!"

"You saw her yourself walk off the parade with him arm-in-arm this morning," cried the mother, waxing warm in her turn.

"Just excuse me, ma'am; I see it all!—when Winnie saw that, she

thought he was married. No, ma'am, we have no such scoundrels in 'ours'? That lady is the wife of Barton's sailor brother, and her own husband is in China. And you cut Barton dead to-night near the band.—I'll go and find the fellow."

And before that moon had paled there was another pair of lovers, and Mrs. Graham sat in her easy chair pretending to crochet, and listening drowsily to a double fire of earnest requests for the fixing of early wedding-days. MINNIE DOUGLAS.

A GOOD-BYE.

FAREWELL! How soon unmeasured distance rolls
Its leaden clouds between our parted souls!
How little to each other now are we—
And once how much I dreamed we two might be!
I, who now stand with eyes undimmed and dry
To say good-bye.

To say good-bye to all sweet memories,
Good-bye to tender questions, soft replies;
Good-bye to hope, good-bye to dreaming too,
Good-bye to all things dear—good-bye to you.
Without a kiss, a tear, a prayer, a sigh—
Our last good-bye.

I had no chain to bind you with at all;
No grace to charm, no beauty to enthrall;
No power to hold your eyes with mine, and make
Your heart on fire with longing for my sake.
Till all the yearning passed into one cry:
"Love, *not* good-bye!"

Ah, no—I had no strength like that, you know;
Yet my worst weakness was to love you so!
So much too well—so much too well—or ill—
Yet even that might have been pardoned still—
It would have been had I been you—you I!
But now—good-bye.

How soon the bitter follows on the sweet!
Could I not chain your fancy's flying feet?
Could I not hold your soul—to make you play
To-morrow in the key of yesterday—?
Dear—do you dream that I would stoop to try?—
Ah, no—good-bye!

E. NESBIT.

M. ELLEN STABLE

R. AND E. TAYLOR.

THE ARGOSY.

DECEMBER, 1883.

WINIFRED POWER.

By Joyce Darrell, Author of "The Sapphire Cross."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AT ELMSLEIGH ONCE MORE.

RALPH MERCER did not put in an appearance at the Dallases' for some days, during which time his sister, Mrs. Dallas, suffered every phase of gentle anxiety. At last, he came one morning when Mr. Dallas and the young people were out. He had a short interview with Mrs. Dallas; poured into her sympathetic ear an interesting but slightly garbled tale; borrowed all the money she had in her possession, and departed, bound, he assured her, for London.

Mary Russell, on her side, only remained at Winifred's a very brief time after her discomfiture; she hardly once issued from her bedroom, except for her meals, which she consumed in gloomy silence. Finally, one evening a note came for her; and she also went—back to Provence and her friends there, as she informed Winifred.

Mark Hatherley was the next to leave. He had several conversations with Gertrude, who told him all she knew, or guessed, of Ralph's recent relations with Mrs. Russell. She believed that, after reading Martha Freake's letter in London, he had made a special journey to Provence in search of Mary, whose whereabouts Gertrude was able to tell him. For when she left the Grahams and returned to Camden Town, her uncle was not at his lodgings. He came back the next day, and mentioned that he had been, and was soon returning, abroad "on business." He was always mysterious, and she had asked no questions, knowing that it would be useless. Why he had not gone sooner in search of Mary and induced her to betake herself at an earlier date to Paris, Gertrude did not know.

Mark stood musing. "There is still a great deal that I do not understand yet, Lady Hatherley. Ralph never mentioned Ridgeley to you?"

"Never."

"And now what do you mean to do for yourself? You will accept an allowance from me?"

"Not a penny. I think I shall go back to the Grahams. I wrote to Ned the other day, and according to his answer I shall decide."

She tried to speak indifferently; nevertheless—blushed.

"But—forgive me—surely your position there is a little unusual. A house with no lady at the head of it——"

"I learnt to despise appearances long ago," Gertrude interrupted, with one of her cynical smiles. "Besides, there is the old housekeeper, Mrs. Wade, who is a rock of respectability; and Mr. Graham, as you must have seen for yourself, is as blind and deaf to outward influences as one of his own scarabæi. Try not to trouble yourself any more about me, Mark. We must not be made too comfortable, we Dallases. Prosperity does not agree with us."

"I cannot say it seems to me that adversity does," observed Mark, gravely smiling.

"Probably no extremes do. As Dick says, we are either beggars on horseback, or failures off it."

She gave him her hand, with a look half-arch, half-soft, that disarmed his reproach, and nodded a friendly "good-bye" to Winifred.

"I often wonder what will be her ultimate fate," said the latter as the door closed, leaving herself and Mark alone. "She is a perplexing creature—incompletely noble, incompletely charming; full of an elusive, wayward sort of attractiveness, and yet often quite exasperating and always unaccountable."

Winifred raised her eyes to her companion, in expectation of some answer; but the look she met made her change colour, and drove Gertrude out of her head. Mark was steadily regarding her, as he often did when they were alone together; but although his glance was fixed on her lips, the words she had just uttered had evidently not reached him. That is to say, he was thinking of her and not of her speech. She felt it, and was troubled. He still seemed at the same untraversable distance from her as when he first came—days ago; and yet sometimes she felt as though it rested only with herself to break down the invisible barrier.

She answered his look with more of sorrowful questioning in her eyes than she guessed; his own left her face then, but slowly, gravely; and his mouth set itself to an expression of steadfast sadness, very habitual to it of late.

"You are really going away to-morrow? You—you still have much to do at The Limes?"

She spoke the commonplace words hesitatingly, timidly almost, but her pure, womanly feeling thrilled through her tones.

"Yes."

"And, afterwards, what do you mean to do?" Then as he did not answer, she forced herself to add, "I suppose of Sir John's fortune there is nothing left?"

"Nothing that I would touch," answered Mark, with an unconscious stern bitterness that startled her from its intensity.

Mark had been undergoing a great struggle with himself, ever since his arrival in Paris. He loved Winifred better than ever; and more than ever, in his present loneliness, did he long for companionship such as hers. But his position was now so altered and his future so uncertain, that honour and prudence alike forbade his taking on himself the additional burden of a wife. For this reason he had resolutely blinded himself to the new softness of the girl's manner, and had abstained from recalling by look or word the memory of their last interview, and of all that it had left unsaid.

But this silence was beginning to try him sorely; and he felt the imperative need of some sympathy in his latest and hardest trial. There were few people to whom pride and regretful affection combined would allow him to speak of his father's dishonour; and with nobody had he yet shared his newest and most painful discovery.

But Winifred was so true and so sweet; a woman of most womanly compassionateness, and yet capable of a silence like the grave. To her, at any rate, he could confide, and perhaps she would understand the rest without his saying it; perhaps, if she really loved him—and sometimes he had almost dared to think she did—she would question not, but wait.

So he told her everything quite quietly and simply, and yet in such a way that with her pitiful insight she understood, far better than he thought, all that he had suffered and was suffering of humiliation and of pain.

She did not say much, but her rapt attention and sweet listening face were in themselves an anodyne, and soothed his aching spirit.

"You see how completely this alters my life," he concluded. "My father's sister and the widow and children of his brother stand to me now in a new relation. They are first on the long list of those whom he has wronged and defrauded. Even ordinary creditors, such as tradesmen and others to whom he owed enormous sums, could hardly be fully satisfied of their claims by the cession of all he possessed. And these new obligations are morally still heavier, still more imperative. *He* lived, and *I* was educated in luxury, at the expense of these defenceless women and children. Make them some restitution now I *must;* and I can only do it out of my own property. For many future years, perhaps for always, I must seek the means of personal support in some source quite apart from my inheritance. Fortunately I have been offered a place of manager of a bank in the north of England. This will give me a small certain income, and a great deal of regular work. I shall begin the new career as soon as possible."

"In the north of England? And you are going to live there, away from all your friends—alone?"

He smiled at the simplicity of the question.

"A man soon finds such associates as suffice to save him from the

worst forms of isolation. What is indispensable to me now is occupation. The rest I can do without. At least—I must try."

She was standing close to him, her head bent; but at the new inflexion of his voice, she looked up, and again their eyes met in a long, eloquent, mournful glance. Mark turned pale, and drew a deep breath of conquered emotion. Then he took both her hands in his strong and tender grasp, and plunged his eyes into the serene, sad depths of hers.

"You are strong, Winifred. Help me to be so."

That was all he said, but they understood one another, and silently registered a mutual vow to wait.

As Richard Dallas had received a cablegram from America, summoning him as quickly as possible to his new employment, it was settled that Dolly and he should be married immediately, and the fiancée was excessively anxious for the ceremony to take place at Elmsleigh in the midst of her old acquaintances. She, characteristically, cared very little for the discredit that had fallen through Sir John upon the Hatherleys, except in so far that it affected Mark. And as her mother, who was equally indifferent and had a cat-like fondness for familiar places, had taken a cottage near The Limes, there was nothing to prevent Dolly from gratifying her desire.

"I must have a pretty wedding, even though it be a cheap one. Ellen Coles and Sabina Swanwick" (her former two particular rivals, confidants and dearest foes) "must be bridesmaids as well as Flossie. I will wear white cashmere trimmed with silk, and a ruffle round my throat of the new lace, Freda; and Mark, you *will* give me away, won't you?"

"With frightful violence to my own feelings, Dolly," laughed Mark. Enchanted at the compliment, she stood on tip-toe to kiss him, and told him he was a "dear old bear."

Mrs. Hatherley, as may be imagined, had not been too well pleased at the idea of Dolly's marriage with so incurable a detrimental as Dick. But, as she remarked plaintively in one of her letters, "it no longer seemed the fashion to consult the wishes of parents;" and her daughter, making very little account of her querulous protests, despatched orders about the wedding by every post. The only consolation Dolly offered her was the assurance that in America teaching is extremely well paid; that she and Dick had already projected a college in Chicago which was certain to be a success, and that in a few years she anticipated having Flossie over as a kind of "walking lady" to receive callers and give the thing an air.

For the rest, the Dallases' wonderful friends had been very kind as usual: Dick was to have his outfit provided; and his new employer paid his passage.

The last days of the two girls' life in Paris passed with surprising rapidity. There were Winifred's artist friends to say good-bye to; Dolly's pupils to call on and in most cases to console; and, finally,

Claire to take leave of. The little fleuriste, still overflowing with gratitude, was enchanted at the idea of her cher Monsieur Richard having won for himself so pretty a wife; and she regarded the American plan as a certain El Dorado. She made Dolly an exquisite wedding-wreath, and brought it as a parting gift on the night before the bride-elect's departure.

Gertrude, having had a rapturous letter from Ned Graham, started with Winifred and Dolly for London. A little crowd of friends assembled at the station to see them off and to sympathize with the tearful Mrs. Dallas and the excited Georgie. Dolly hung on Richard's arm up to the very last moment, with a proud air of possession. Winifred did not know how to hold all the bouquets thrust upon her, nor when to leave off saying "Thank you," and begin saying "Good-bye." Mrs. Dallas poured motherly admonitions into one ear of Gertrude, while Georgie monopolized the other with a perpetual "*Mind* you write." Mr. Dallas pervaded the groups, and looked benignantly superior to all emotion. At last the doors were flung apart, and strangers ruthlessly ordered back; there was a moment's wild confusion of tears and smiles, good-byes, adieux—"You'll write"—"I'll come;" and the three travellers were hurried into a compartment. Dick, who had got through somehow, stood on the step and was again absorbed by Dolly, until a guard ordered him off. Then he wrung Winifred's hand with unusual fervour; bestowed a final kiss on his sweetheart, and shot a parting bolt of "chaff" at Gertrude. After which, the train got itself into motion, and the chequered life in Paris was a thing of the past.

In London, Gertrude left them, while Winifred and Dolly proceeded straight to Elmsleigh. Mark and Florence met them there at the station; the latter took possession of her sister, Mark accompanied Winifred to her mother's door. A carriage had been sent for her, but neither Mr. nor Mrs. Burton appeared, being, in fact, at a dinner-party.

"Won't you come in?" said the girl, as Mark prepared to take leave of her on the threshold of the vicarage.

"No. You must be tired."

"Nonsense!"

"All the same, I won't come in now."

"To-morrow, then?"

Mark hesitated.

"I had better be frank with you. Mrs. Burton does not care to see me just now, I think."

He held her hand a moment; released it suddenly; and saying "Good-night," left her. She had been speechless with surprise and shame, and was still trembling with indignation as she entered the hall of the house, and responded to the greeting of the servants. She knew quite well what Mark had meant: the change in his circumtances. How cruel to let him feel it! Winifred thought more of

this than of the disappointment to herself. While she ate her supper, her spirits sank miserably till they fell to zero. Presently she heard carriage-wheels; then her mother's voice in the hall; and hurried out prepared to meet with and return any amount of affection. Nor was she disappointed.

"My sweet Winifred—my darling child!" exclaimed Mrs. Burton, falling picturesquely into her tall daughter's arms. "How I have longed for this moment! Your dear face has never been out of my thoughts. You naughty, ungrateful pet! At last, you have condescended to come back to your poor, lonely little mamsie!"

"I am sure Winifred would have come home sooner, had she thought you really needed her," blunderingly put in poor Mr. Burton, good-naturedly afraid that his step-daughter might be hurt at the implied reproach. His wife shot him a sidelong glance of scorn.

"Come into the drawing-room, sweet. I long to be alone with you."

"But is not Mr. Burton also coming?" inquired Winifred, anxious in her turn to cultivate pleasant relations.

"Mr. Burton has his own pursuits, my love. I never complain, even when I feel most isolated. Many mothers would have begged for the return of the *one* ewe lamb," said the vicar's wife pastorally, "but I never exact sacrifices. I could not have borne to see this sweet face clouded by discontent at poor mamsie's wishes having to be considered before other people's:" and with an enchanting smile Mrs. Burton put one dainty finger into the dimple of her daughter's cheek. Winifred stiffened involuntarily, wondering how it was that her mother always irritated her by making her feel half-remorseful for fancied neglect, and half-rebellious at her remorse.

Mr. Burton, who had not taken the very broad hint given to him, appeared in the sitting-room—a kindly cordiality on his large countenance.

"I am very glad to see you, my dear," he said, standing in front of Winifred, and looking approvingly at her upturned face. "I am not very clever at finding out what young people care for, but I should like you to understand that you are quite welcome to anything you want, and have only to ask for it to get it."

Winifred felt an unaccountable emotion at this homely, hospitable speech; she rose, and laying her hands on the speaker's broad shoulders, kissed him affectionately on both his cheeks.

"There! there!" said Mr. Burton, himself quite red with pleasure, but patting her on the back with an evident idea that she wanted soothing. "We shall get on in first-rate style, I am sure. Ahem! my dear, has she had any supper?"

"I am not in the habit of forgetting anybody's wants, that I am aware of; still less my daughter's," answered his wife majestically; and the good man creaked off—his shoes always creaked—with a look half-troubled, half-snubbed, that went to Winifred's heart.

Mr. Burton and his step-daughter became very good friends after that first evening; the vicar having a dim idea, which he could not have made articulate to save his life, that she was somehow different from most women in giving a good deal less trouble. Once he got so far as to communicate or seek to communicate this impression to the partner of his joys; but it was not well received.

"Winifred is peculiar," said Mrs. Burton. "It is not my custom to complain, and I love her dearly. My nature, highly sensitive, requires to expand itself in affection, and in thought for others. When I first became a mother, I thought that I had all I needed. But I have been cruelly stricken—although I never say it. And if, since my darling child has grown up, I have sometimes felt that she is different from my ideal, the confession has never passed my lips. Few people understand me. I feel that misapprehension will be my fate to the end. But I try to believe that the fault lies with myself, and *not* with my dear ones."

"Humph!" remarked Mr. Burton, and wondered still inarticulately, at the curious refractive power of his wife's mind—ideas sent into her quite straight were reflected by her crookedly. He could not comprehend it. But then he never really tried: having long ago made up his mind that women were naturally mysterious dispensations, and that to him had been allotted the most perplexing of them.

Meanwhile, Mark coming not, he and Winifred only met at Mrs. Hatherley's—and there not very often, for the young man was hardly made more welcome at Vine Cottage than at the Vicarage; and he rarely called on his aunt except when business obliged him to do it. Mrs. Hatherley's manner towards him was full of sullen hostility and womanly mistrust. She could not forgive his father for having died ruined, nor Mark for being his father's son. Not all her nephew's forbearance and generosity could touch her heart. Some malignant-minded wiseacre had said that probably "Young Hatherley knew what he was about, and had feathered his own nest while pretending to give up everything;" and this suggestion falling on the rank soil of the creole's mind, bore a flourishing crop of suspicions.

Mark's one consolation in these days was the sympathy of Winifred. He had few opportunities of seeing her alone, and when they came, he never spoke of his troubles; but often when some ungracious speech of Mrs. Hatherley's had sorely tried his patience, he would catch sight of Winifred's indignant eyes, and from them he gathered fresh strength to listen and reply not.

Dolly was the one connecting link between the dwellers in Vine Cottage and Mark on the one hand; between them and Winifred on the other. She was uniformly kind to her cousin, and had many a pitched battle with her mother on his account. And solely to please her, Mark consented, after the final auction at The Limes, and his own migration to London lodgings, to put off his departure for the north until Dolly's marriage was over.

The day of that important event dawned at last brilliantly fine; and the wedding, although very quiet, went off to the little bride's content. She looked bewitching, and Dick was the most self-possessed of bridegrooms. A satisfactory amount of envy was excited in the gentle bosoms of Ellen Coles and Sabina Swanwick; and Mark, poor fellow! distinguished himself by giving the best of all the presents. Flossie shed cataracts of tears, and Mrs. Hatherley, through an imperceptible draught from the vestry-room, sneezed fifteen times in succession.

"This is the end," said Mark, in a low tone, to Winifred, when the last handful of rice had been thrown and the few guests were taking their departure. "To-day I shake the dust of Elmsleigh from my shoes, and to morrow night I start for my new home. Will you think of me there sometimes? And you will write to me? Thanks. Good-bye."

He grasped her hand with a force that almost hurt it; flashed one look into her eyes; then bade a hasty farewell to the nearest by-standers and was gone.

"Hi! Stop! Hatherley, won't you come to the Vicarage to dinner?" called out Mr. Burton after him; but an imperious glance from his wife so surprised him for a minute or two as to deprive him of the power of speech. By the time he recovered and would fain have renewed his invitation, Mark's rapid stride had carried him across the little garden and half-way down the road. Mr. Burton could not get over it, and on the way home continued lamenting that his hospitable inspiration had not come sooner.

"If you had told me of your wishes I should not have forgotten them, although I might not have approved," said Mrs. Burton. "But it appears to be the fashion to take everything out of my hands. I wonder Winifred did not invite him. She was sure of your sanction."

"But not of yours, mother," retorted Winifred, in uncontrollable bitterness, for it had nearly broken her heart to see Mark go away like that.

"Oh, *mine!* That is a small matter. If I counted for anything (and I am accustomed to count for nothing, but I don't complain) it would be remembered that I never liked Mr. Hatherley—never. And for my part, if you will allow me to express an opinion, my love, I am very glad he is gone."

Winifred made no answer; but her stepfather broke in sturdily:

"I don't pretend to contest your opinions, my wife; but I really do not know what you can have against the poor fellow. He h been hardly used, and has behaved admirably."

Mrs. Burton turned up her eyes in mute and long-suffering protest at this contradiction and conclusion, but "said nothing."

"I feel really sorry for him," Mr. Burton grumbled on. "It is not pleasant to have to begin the world all over again at his age. Mark must be nearly thirty."

"He will be that age to-morrow," quietly said Mr. Luscombe, whom Mrs. Burton herself had invited to dine at the Vicarage, and who had now overtaken his host and hostess just in time to overhear the vicar's concluding remark.

Mr. Luscombe, before Sir John's reign, had been the Hatherley family lawyer; and Mrs. Hatherley, who had known him in old days, had wished for his presence at her daughter's wedding.

He was the neatest, freshest, most dapper, apparently the most inoffensive of little men. Yet Winifred turned on him a glance of scant favour. For he had said that Mark would be "thirty to-morrow" in a tone which annoyed her. There was more than indifference in it—there was almost a kind of pleasure. And what reason could he have for rejoicing that Mark, at an age when most men know what is before them, had to start on a new and uncertain career?

CHAPTER XXXV.

MR. LUSCOMBE'S REVELATIONS.

GERTRUDE, for obvious reasons, had not been present at her brother's wedding, and was living all this time very quietly at the Grahams', under the name of Mrs. Hatherley.

She had had a long conversation with Mr. Graham on her return, and had agreed with him that it was better to resume her husband's name, but, at the same time, to drop the title. The old gentleman had proved extremely kind, and had waived all difficulties with an ease which, if it were partly due to his want of worldly wisdom, was at any rate to the last degree convenient and refreshing.

Mrs. Wade, astonished but respectful, had had as much explained to her as she had any need to know, and Gertrude had reinstalled herself beside Ned's chair, with more of pleasure than her jaded spirit ever expected to find in human companionship again. The boy had been most unfeignedly and undisguisedly glad to see her, and had half declared that she must promise never, *never* to leave him.

"It is not so very much to ask you as it sounds," he said. "For see," and he held up his hand. "It is even thinner than when you first came, and it sometimes takes me ten days now before I can make up my mind to walk across the room. So you will still be quite young and as beautiful as ever when I shall not need you any more."

Gertrude took the transparent, listless hand in her warm grasp, and longed passionately that she could infuse some of the restless abounding vitality that throbbed in her own veins to his. It seemed an unjust Fate, that which gave her health and youth and mental activity; while Ned, who had serenity, moral strength and calm, was hastening fast from the "weariness, the fever and the fret," of all that men call living.

These were poor unquiet Gertrude's reflections as she sat softly stroking the lad's hand until he dropped asleep. She stayed her

soothing ministration then, and bending her gipsy face over his white one, gave herself up to long and mournful contemplation of his ethereal brow and pallid cheeks. He was in truth greatly altered, and she felt that he was right in saying that the world would not hold him much longer. The quiet conviction with which he had said it, so divorced from regret, had affected Gertrude strangely. She had been accustomed, in her exaggerated way, to say that life was of small account, and that she was ready to part with it. Now for the first time it struck her fully how far removed she was from the solemn courage that can fairly look the "King of Terrors" in the face—as far, indeed, as from the active faith in good that alone makes life worth living.

A slight stir caused her to look up, and she became aware that Dr. Kenyon was behind her. He had come in noiselessly—everybody did things noiselessly in that enchanted castle of a house—and had been standing there for how long a time she did not know. She only felt instinctively that he had been looking at her, and in the moment of her turning had ceased to do so. He drew nearer then, and held out his hand very quietly and gravely. This was their first meeting since her return, and she was surprised and provoked to feel how much less self-possessed she was than he. Fortunately he did not seem to notice how vividly she blushed, nor how pale she grew afterwards; his attention was apparently fixed on Ned.

"You find him much altered?"

She bent her head in answer to the murmured question, and then Dr. Kenyon made her a sign to follow him into the hall.

"The lad is slowly dying. It may be an affair of months, but there is no hope of his ever being again even as well as when you first knew him. Do you mean to leave him again?"

The question, asked abruptly, almost harshly, roused Gertrude's facile anger. She had promised Ned to stay, and meant to do so; but she felt perversely disinclined to admit as much to one who was a self-constituted judge.

"That will depend," she said, and throwing her head back, looked at him defiantly.

"You must do as you like, of course; but I think you should be told that your presence is of use to the boy. It distinctly does him good, as being different from anything that he has known throughout these long years of suffering, and pain, and monotony. He drooped after you left, and will never recover the ground he lost then. If you care to be a source of joy to a fellow-creature whose life has been a very joyless one, you will remain by Ned Graham until the last."

"For *his* sake I shall probably do so," replied Gertrude, haughtily.

"But not for mine, you mean? I did not ask you to do it for mine."

And with a ceremonious bow, in strange contrast to his remarkably

rude speech, Dr. Kenyon marched off, leaving Gertrude considerably less enchanted with her own arrogance than she had ever been in all her life before.

She felt so angry that she could not settle to anything; and by way of calming herself, ravished Mrs. Wade by offering to do some commissions for her in town. Half an hour later she found herself in Oxford Street, and was greatly pleased to run up against Mark, who was coming out of a shop. They met with the utmost cordiality.

"Do you really go to-night?" asked Gertrude.

"I hope so. But this morning I received a mysterious communication from Luscombe and Wheeler to attend at their office at three o'clock. I am off there now. I cannot guess what they want with me: nothing, I hope, to detain me in town."

"Perhaps the £10,000 has turned up," laughed Gertrude.

Mark shook his head. "No such luck. By-the-bye, have you seen anything of Mr. Mercer?"

"Nothing whatever. As Dick would express it, he has doubtless 'ducked under' again." She then asked about the wedding, wished him prosperity, and shook hands warmly with him, with a parting recommendation: "If Luscombe and Wheeler have to announce a fortune to you, I shall expect you to let me know at once."

Three hours later, when she was reading to Ned, a telegram was put into her hands, and she had hardly glanced at it when an exclamation of uncontrollable pleasure broke from her lips, for it was signed "Mark," and contained the inconceivably delightful words:

"Journey northwards given up. The £10,000 are mine."

Mark, on arriving at the solicitors' office, had been received by the dapper little gentleman whom he had seen for the first time on the previous day at Dolly's wedding.

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Hatherley," was the lawyer's greeting. "I know more about you than you have probably guessed. I was extremely well acquainted with your grandfather, and in his younger days with your father; but for years before his death I saw nothing of him."

Mark made no answer beyond a slight bow. He had once or twice heard his father mention Mr. Luscombe, and always with aversion. Alas! he had learnt to have a good opinion of the people whose society Sir John avoided.

"Your grandfather, long ago, when you were quite a little boy—four or five years old only—gave me a charge to keep you in view."

"My grandfather?" interrupted Mark. "I have lately had reason to think that he did not know of my existence."

"There you are mistaken. He did know of it, although it was revealed to him by chance but a very short time before his own death. He found it out partly through an anonymous letter, partly through your cousin Martha Freake."

Mark uttered an exclamation of pained surprise. He had always wondered why his father had betrayed Martha. The hypothesis of love for Mary being inadmissible, any other made the cruelty seem inconceivably wanton. Was the explanation to be some knowledge possessed by Martha of his marriage?

"In order to make things clear to you," resumed Mr. Luscombe, "I must tell you a long story, and begin at the very beginning. Your grandfather, like many other old gentlemen, had a mania for making wills. In proportion as his daily interest in life slackened, the ultimate disposition of his large fortune absorbed more and more of his thoughts. But we have only to consider two of his wills. No. 1, under which your father did actually inherit; No. 2, under which he should have been cut off with a shilling, but which mysteriously disappeared."

"There was also a codicil made within a few hours of his death," put in Mark, mindful of an observation dropped by Mary Russell to Dolly in one of her recent rages.

"With that we have nothing to do. The codicil, if it ever existed, was never found; it would have been useless, for I understand it was not signed. Will No. 1 was made at a time when your grandfather was equally irritated against his second son William, and his daughter Mary. William, as you know, was the first real scamp of his family; and Miss Hatherley had incurred her father's anger by her engagement to Ralph Mercer. The consequence was, that old Mr. Hatherley disinherited both his younger children, and left every penny of his money to John. Your father at that time exercised an enormous influence over him; an influence which would have surprised me had I not always observed how shrewdness gives place to prejudice in the old. Imagine, then, my surprise when one day your grandfather sent for me, and informed me of his intention to make will No. 2. 'Had he destroyed No. 1?' I asked. 'No,' he said; adding rather discontentedly, "John had possession of that. But it did not matter. No. 2 would annul No. 1." Amazed, I heard that this time he intended to disinherit all his children and leave his entire property to a charity. I broke out into protest, but he flew into a violent rage; said his children deserved nothing from him, and that John—immaculate John!—was the worst of all. Little by little, as well as anger would allow, he told me that your father was secretly married, and had been for years, to a lady of the name of Lyndon, of whom nobody seemed to know anything. His informant—an anonymous one—was evidently some enemy of John's who had given himself the trouble to discover just as much of the facts as would serve the purposes of mischief. Your grandfather had despatched Miss Freake to explore Linden Grove Road, and she had obtained sundry clandestine glimpses of your mother and of you."

"She never tried to speak to my mother, I presume?"

"No. I am sure she did not; for she was, I remember, quite unaware of your mother's sad and strange affliction. My own first intimation of it came from your father's statement at Miss Freake's own trial, a month or two later."

Mark remained silent. What a tangled web the whole story was! And how much seemed destined never to be made quite clear!

"Miss Freake," continued Mr. Luscombe, "seemed to have been fascinated by *your* appearance. Her loving description of you, your ways, your beauty, your delicacy (you had just recovered from an illness), although very impatiently listened to at first, did eventually soften your grandfather's heart a little, and had a result which you will shortly learn. But against your mother he remained very bitter. It was one of his crotchets that she could not be a person of respectability, or your father would not have kept her existence a secret. Times out of number did he say, He has always hypocritically made a merit of having given up Margaret Hatherley to please me; and yet far more gladly would I have opened my doors even to my ungrateful sister's child than to this unknown Jezebel. Your grandfather was not accustomed to measure his expressions; and as I listened to him I thought that your father's marriage was a kind of judgment on him for the arrogant harshness which in will No. 1 had made him insert the clause relative to this very Margaret Hatherley."

"And, after all, she *was* my mother," said Mark.

Mr. Luscombe did not know that. He sat speechless with astonishment; nor did he recover his speech until Mark had finished his brief statement of Mr. Graham's revelations. Then he gave a long, low whistle.

"Then this identity of Margaret Lyndon with Margaret Hatherley was of course the reason why John kept his marriage secret! I see it all. He was caught in his own trap: or rather he would have been, could will No. 2 have been found."

"How came it not to be found?" inquired Mark.

Mr. Luscombe shrugged his shoulders. "The old man *would* always keep such documents in his own house. Perhaps he destroyed it before his death."

"Perhaps my father destroyed it," was Mark's pained thought, not uttered, however, although he saw it reflected in the lawyer's own face.

"We, Miss Freake and I, did our best in several confidential interviews to make him destroy it; and I think that, towards the last, although he would not own it, he may have begun to waver."

"In one way, all that matters very little now," said Mark. "My grandfather would turn in his grave, could he know how utterly annihilated is the fortune, about which he troubled himself so much."

"Well, the greater part of it is gone, certainly," replied the lawyer, with an odd smile. "But a pretty little sum is now to revert to you."

"To me!"

"Even so. As I have told you. Miss Freake softened your grandfather's heart towards you, by her enthusiasm and entreaties. John he persisted in disinheriting; for your mother he would do nothing; and, with his strange vindictiveness, he wished no knowledge of his intentions regarding yourself to mar the punishment that he contemplated inflicting on your parents. Consequently he would not name you in the will—will No. 2, remember—but he sold out and reinvested £10,000 for your exclusive use and benefit, leaving in my hands written directions, which you can now read for yourself, to the effect that you were only to touch the money at the age of thirty. And even then you were not to have it if you had turned out badly. My own notion is that you have turned out extremely well, and I have much pleasure in congratulating you on this unexpected and most legitimate recovery of a portion of your grandfather's wealth. It has been accumulating for twenty-five years at 6 per cent., and amounts now to nearly £60,000."

Mark sat silent in a rush of feelings. He was not poor; he could marry Winifred, and, above all, this money was rightly, fully, fairly his. It had been left through no ignorance, obtained through no fraud, and was no larger a sum than a just distribution of his grandfather's property would have originally ensured to him.

He had rarely looked so bright as when he left Luscombe and Wheeler's office on that eventful afternoon. Suddenly remembering Gertrude's laughing prophecy, he despatched her the telegram, and then took the first train down to Elmsleigh.

Mrs. Burton, returning from one of the garden-parties in which her soul rejoiced, was greatly scandalized to find Mark in her drawing-room. As if his uninvited presence there were not bad enough, he was standing close to Winifred, and holding her hands in his; while on the faces of both was a gladness that jarred uncomfortably on the worldly wisdom of the vicar's wife.

She came forward with her best air of haughty surprise, and the lovers stood a little apart, but appeared altogether undaunted.

"I have come to claim Winifred, Mrs. Burton," Mark said. "Long ago she promised to share my home and my life."

Mrs. Burton smiled superiorly.

"I was not aware, Mr. Hatherley, that you *had* a home. I was under the impression that it was broken up. I thought I had been told that your life for some time to come would not offer such advantages that you could *quite* honourably ask a young girl to share it. It is not the fashion to consider my authority as anything—Winifred, don't interrupt your mother—but I fancy, somehow, that in some cases the most high-minded course is silence. I may be mistaken, of course; and people may think that their opinions are to be allowed to ride rough-shod over a parent's. But I shall be much surprised if my darling daughter will *quite* consent to be spirited away in utter defiance of her sole surviving guardian's wishes."

"But, mother," said Winifred quietly. "Mark has just come into a fortune."

"*What?*" cried Mrs. Burton, standing on one foot with her hands outspread, and a lace pocket-handkerchief in one of them.

"My grandfather left me £10,000 invested at 6 per cent.; and as I was not to touch it until my thirtieth birthday, accumulation has added largely to the sum," said Mark. "It amounts now to £60,000."

"Is this true?"

"Quite true," replied Mark, and added a few convincing proofs. She glanced at him with a sunny smile.

"Did I not always say you were born to good-luck?"

"Perhaps you did. My memory is rather treacherous."

"But mine is lasting, like my affections. Where those I love are concerned my insight is prophetic. And, dear Mark, instinctively I always loved *you*."

"And will you give me Winifred?"

"Winifred?" Mrs. Burton repeated the name, looking at her daughter with an arch tenderness. "Does my pet wish to leave me? I suppose I must not ask. If you have won her heart, Mark, take her. I am not selfish, I believe; and the last thing I could do would be to interfere with a child's happiness."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CONCLUSION.

It so happened that on the day following that on which Mark had received his good news, a letter arrived to him from France, written by his aunt Mary. It contained the full outpouring of all her venom, intensified and bitter. The diseased sense of her wrongs had dwelt with her so long that she evidently could not conceive anybody not sympathizing with her. And now that John and Martha were both dead, she gave herself up to the luxury of telling the whole truth.

Her consciousness of her own baseness in the part played against her cousin Martha was completely absorbed and obliterated by her savage desire to be even, at last, with John. Fear of him removed by his death, the suppressed hatred and resentment of years found voice in her. She did not even care to conceal that she had only not spoken weeks sooner, because Ralph Mercer had aroused in her delusive hopes that some tangible advantage was to be gained by silence and scheming. This last frail reed had broken, and she was frankly sorry for herself and shamelessly ready to say it.

It never seemed to occur to her that this was a sorrow best buried in silence. Her avarice had made her ready to grasp at any means of added income; and the same feeling brought her now in grovelling entreaty to Mark's feet. The letter wound up with a pathetic picture of all that she had suffered in the past from want of means; and all

that she must suffer in the future. She entreated Mark to be generous even while not able to forbear from an acrid hint that he would not be just; and she concluded with a furious burst of rage against Mercer.

Mark read the letter with disgust; but he was not sorry to have received it. It supplied the missing links in his chain of information, and enabled him fully to understand at last the ignoble comedy played in the far-off years when his gentle mother held him in her arms and perhaps sought in his baby-smile for the sweetness that had most surely not crowned her marriage. He answered Mary temperately, but coldly. Just he could be, but not generous; his hatred of baseness and his scorn of lying were too strong for that. She was already in receipt of an income from him, which lifted her entirely above want; and he expressed his willingness to take steps for insuring the payment of this as long as she lived.

He had hardly finished writing this letter, when a visitor was announced; and Ralph Mercer, quite as self-possessed as when we last saw him, but perceptibly more dilapidated, swaggered in.

Mark met him with very cool courtesy; but at every period of his career, it had taken much more than the signs of a scanty welcome to shake Mr. Mercer's equanimity.

"My dear friend ——" he began.

"Your dear what?" interrupted Mark, frowning angrily.

"I might say 'cousin.' Would you prefer that?"

His cool insolence left Mark in two minds; whether to laugh, or to kick him out. By an effort of self-control he did neither.

"You see me, my dear fellow," resumed his visitor, "at the very lowest ebb of my fortunes. I am bankrupt not only in purse but in affection. A fortnight ago I believed that I still possessed some anchorage in friendship, founded upon what was once a warmer sentiment. I allude to your Aunt Mary. I thought she would have married me. But she says she will not."

"You cannot deny that there is prudence in the resolution?" observed Mark sarcastically.

"Prudence is a virtue which I have never appreciated," returned the pseudo Colonel Quince. "I hope you will listen quietly to that which I have come to say. Last evening I paid a visit to Mrs. Hatherley. She had just seen Mrs. Burton, who had communicated to her the interesting intelligence of her charming daughter's approaching marriage with yourself. Miss Power is a young lady of intellect and character, and ——"

"We will not talk about Miss Power," interrupted Mark.

Ralph shrugged his shoulders. "Anything to oblige you. I was only going to remark that Mrs. Burton, doubtless instructed by her daughter, had related to Mrs. Hatherley a thrilling, but I venture to think a slightly nonveracious, tale of your recent unexpected accession to fortune. The story does credit to your ingenuity; but

it does not take *me* in. To be brief, I am confirmed in my old idea that your father was considerably less ruined than was stated."

"Well?"

Mark uttered the monosyllable so quietly that Ralph was quite deceived, and thought, as he would himself have expressed it, that he had "scored a point."

"I know that 'possession is nine points of the law,'" he resumed; "and I am prepared to hear you say that, after this lapse of time, it would be very difficult to upset your grandfather's will. Nevertheless, if it could be proved (*and I undertake* to prove it) that your father inherited through the basest dishonesty and the most unmistakable fraud, I fancy it would not be difficult to find a lawyer to take up the case. I don't pretend that he would be a respectable lawyer, but he would certainly be a sharp one. The ways of litigation are lengthy; the issues which can be raised by it are many; and the mud which it enables one to throw is so abundant that some portion of it at any rate will stick. If you do not wish to have an ugly story raked up, and your father's memory made infamous, you will be willing to pay for silence. This brings me to the question, 'How much?'"

"Not a penny," said Mark.

Mr. Mercer's face lengthened considerably. He had not much faith in his story as an instrument of terrorism; but he had enormous belief in the mixture of impudence, craft, and glibness which made up his own personality. Was this to be the next thing to fail him?

"The story that I could tell is a very ugly one, my dear sir."

"Be good enough to relate it."

Ralph cleared his throat, crossed his legs, and prepared for narration.

Mark's quiet tone had cheered him up. The story had been very troublesome to piece together; and the prospect of being at last able to relate it coherently caused him quite an artistic pleasure.

"I must trouble you with a few preliminary details. Years ago, your father, when quite a young man, went to America —— You are aware of that, you say? Good. Are you also aware that he there made the acquaintance of his cousin, Margaret Hatherley, and fell in love with her?"

"I am acquainted with the clause in my grandfather's will, under which my father inherited, and all the circumstances attendant on it," said Mark icily.

"*All?* I fancy not: or at any rate I doubt if you will own to them," retorted Ralph. "But," he added with considerable haste, on meeting his hearer's incensed eyes, "I will proceed. The vicissitudes of fortune took me also to America; pursued there as everywhere by ill-luck, I spent my whole time in the Western States. Had I been able to go to Philadelphia, I should doubtless have made the acquaintance of your father's beautiful cousins. Fate, however, was so far kind to me, that I did at last hear of them, but it was on my way home. A fellow-passenger mentioned them inci-

dentally, and dropped also the sad and interesting fact, that the eldest daughter—Margaret—when hardly more than an infant, had met with an accident which rendered her deaf and dumb. 'Margaret!' said I to myself. 'Deaf and dumb?' said I. 'Strange!' Strange I thought it, for I remembered that your mother's name was Margaret. I recollected that she was deaf and dumb. But my wonder hardly turned to suspicion at once, for I am naturally of a simple nature; where your thorough-going villain is concerned, indeed, I am as clay in the hands of the potter. Nevertheless, the coincidence was too striking; it recurred to me perpetually, haunted me day and night. By the time I reached England the instincts of the amateur detective, which I flatter myself are strong in me, were fully aroused. I had cross-questioned my informant as to the name of Lyndon, but on this he could throw no light. He had lost sight of the Hatherleys immediately after the little Margaret's accident. No matter! The mystery only made me keener on the scent. All I wanted to begin with was a little money; £20 would have done for a start, and that is not much to ask, even from such luck as mine. Well, sir," continued Ralph, warming up ingenuously to his subject, "would you believe it, I could not raise even that?"

"I can fully believe it."

"But if I, poor beggar that I am! have few friends, your father had many enemies. As soon as my other business (for I am always very busy) would allow, I addressed myself to two of them—Mrs. Russell and Mrs. Hatherley. The latter gave me some valuable information; the former disbursed a little, a very little, money. You will understand that this was all recently. I put myself in communication with Mrs. Russell immediately on reading Miss Freake's letter, found by Gertrude in Sir John's bureau. To Mrs. Hatherley I addressed myself on the occasion of her recent visit to London. We talked matters over exhaustively, and she gave me a clue—a valuable one—by mentioning your late father's unheard-of generosity towards Ridgeley. '£50!' said I. 'Enormous as an act of benevolence! As the price of a secret its proportions are less.' I made it my business to hunt up Ridgeley, or rather Ridgeley's family; for the man himself, as you know, was unfortunately dead. With some trouble I discovered his mother. She was not rich, and was additionally burthened with her handsome granddaughter. Money was welcome to her; and, allured by its prospect, she made no difficulty about telling all she knew. It did not amount to as much as I had vaguely hoped; but the Lyndon mystery she was able completely to clear up. She had been old Mr. Lyndon's housekeeper for many years, and communicated to me the interesting but not unexpected fact that *Margaret Hatherley and Margaret Lyndon were one and the same person.* What do you think of *that?*"

"Just what I thought a fortnight ago when I first learnt the fact," replied Mark quietly; but his right hand, which lay on the table,

doubled up so significantly that Ralph retreated several inches, and his face fell.

They remained looking at one another without speaking. Mark sat as still as a graven image; but across Mr. Mercer's expressive countenance a variety of emotions travelled. Sardonic rage at last fixed itself there, and Ralph burst into a loud laugh.

"So! A true chip of the old block, I see. Just what I imagined. Never mind papa's little villainies—papa's little frauds. Papa marries the very person the will forbade his marrying, but he inherits all the same. In the first confidence of *generous* youth he writes from America to Martha Freake an enthusiastic account of his beautiful cousins, and goes so far as to say that the loveliest, Margaret, is deaf and dumb. But even then he is cautious enough to conceal the fact of her adoption by Lyndon. And later, as Ridgeley knew, and Ridgeley's mother told me, for fear of Martha's subsequent discoveries he helps to clap her first into prison and then into an asylum. The only danger then remaining is in Ridgeley. Ridgeley is bribed. Sir John is outwardly a millionaire, secretly a swindler. He dies, and his creditors have to suffer; but his son ——"

"Look here!" interrupted Mark steadily. "I give you your choice between leaving this room on the moment or being kicked downstairs!" and he rose.

But Ralph was worked up by excitement to a pitch of factitious courage. He rose, indeed, in his turn, and backed prudently in the direction of the door; but he could not resist a malicious laugh.

"You say you knew it first a fortnight ago—only a fortnight! Who was there to tell it to you then?"

"Your own friend, Mr. Graham."

"Mr. Graham? *Do—you—mean—to—say—he—knew?*"

Ralph's tones, as he gasped out the words, were shrill with amazement. And his face presented such a picture of despair, that Mark's wrath turned to grim amusement.

"Even so. He was acquainted with all the Hatherleys in Philadelphia. Had you chanced upon the subject with him when you made yourself so agreeable at Brighton, you would have saved a great deal of valuable time," said the young man politely.

Ralph dropped into his chair again, and struck his clenched hand upon the table. "Is it not too bad?" he exclaimed.

"Is *what* not too bad?"

"My luck?" And he looked at Mark with the frankest seeking for compassion that a human countenance ever expressed. The ingenuous baseness of the creature was comic. Mark forgave him; but felt none the less anxious to be quit of him.

"Don't you think you had better go, Mr. Mercer?"

Ralph roused himself. He made one final feeble effort.

"Pay me for silence," he resumed, in a tone of appeal. "The story will additionally blacken your father's memory; and a sharp

lawyer might make something of it. At any rate, he will make it quite clear that, in the midst of all his ruin, your father provided for you, and that you were quite willing to be provided for."

"Pray," said Mark, "how do you make that out?"

"Bah! And your new-found fortune?"

"Has reverted to me through a separate disposition made by my grandfather, as you may see for yourself if you choose:" and Mark thrust towards him the letter we know of.

Ralph read it eagerly. A groan of pathetic greed escaped him at the magic figure of £10,000.

"Twenty-five years ago! Six per cent. It must be close upon £60,000 now!" he exclaimed.

"You are quite right," replied Mark calmly.

"Then you will give me a round sum down, and spare your father's memory?"

"I shall do nothing of the sort."

"A hundred pounds? I am a gentleman—your cousin—and I am starving."

"Not a hundred pence."

"Fifty pounds then?"

"No."

"Five?"

"See!" and Mark produced his purse. "I will give you half-a-crown."

Ralph clutched it—his eyes full of tears.

"This will pay for my dinner to-day. I have not dined for a month."

"Ah!" said Mark. "Now will you be so very good as to go?"

And a second time he rose and moved towards the door, his visitor accompanying him step by step, as if drawn by an invisible magnet towards the happy possessor of several thousands of pounds.

"I will come again," he said affectionately, as the young man opened the door for him.

"Not too often, I hope," said Mark politely, and shut him out with a promptitude that reduced his final observations to an inarticulate sob.

He did return at odd intervals of varying length and always with a heart-rending tale. He was a perfect nuisance to everybody even remotely connected with the Hatherleys. Finally he migrated to France to see how much he could worry out of Mary Russell. Gertrude helped him a little, and so did Mrs. Dallas.

Mrs. Hatherley and Florence settled in Devonshire, and had William to live with them. Poor Will! He contributed very little to the enjoyment, and still less to the credit of their lives; but Mrs. Hatherley always attributed his unfortunate proclivities entirely to the disappointments that had awaited him on Sir John's death. She felt hat Mark had behaved only a degree less badly than his father, and

when anybody praised him in her presence, she was accustumed to turn up her eyes and say that nothing is easier than to found a fortune and a reputation on the ruins of other people's.

Gertrude, true to her promise, remained with Ned Graham to the last. And when he was no more, and she thought that she would have to face the world again, and quailed before the prospect, Dr. Kenyon made her an offer of marriage. It was a great triumph for Gertrude, and satisfied a great deal that was least noble in her, as well as all that was best. Dr. Kenyon had disapproved of her so strongly, had been so resolute not to yield, and yielded so suddenly and absolutely at last, that even Gertrude's arrogance could not deny that he was worthy of her. This made her own surrender all the easier, and enabled her to confess that she loved him (and she loved him very much indeed), without derogation from her exalted idea of independence and superiority. She made him a very good wife, being indeed submissive to a degree that surprised everybody. For the rest, he was invariably and consistently kind to her, and being too busy a man to listen to her diatribes, and too clever a one to trouble himself about her theories, Gertrude soon grew absorbed in the cares of a hospitable household and the social duties devolving upon the wife of a man growing yearly more famous.

Dick and Dolly made a great success of it in Boston, the Dallas talents (like Micawber's) being of an order which expanded better in the New World than in the Old. If he never became enterprising, he would at least be always conscientious, and do whatever was allotted to him punctually and well. His subtle kind of intelligence, easy-going ways, and exotic scholarship were brought into sharper contrast with the bright practical mind, definite aims, and consistent energy of his wife. She continued to adore him, and he continued to allow himself to be adored. If he did not love her very passionately, he at least appreciated her more thoroughly than anybody else in the world. And Dolly, when he had admitted, as he was always willing to admit, that she was clever, agreeable, *very* pretty, elegant, even among elegant Americans, and a social success in every way, never dreamed of poisoning her own satisfaction by asking herself if there were depths in his nature which she had failed to stir.

Mark found himself at last in a position to gratify his highest ambition and enter Parliament. Mrs. Burton adored her son-in-law for a few months after the marriage, and told everybody that she had never desired anything so much as that her darling Winifred should marry "this excellent and talented young man." Sometimes her enthusiasm cooled a little, and she sought and obtained a great deal of sympathy on the score of her lonely heart. "A childless widow—for poets may say what they please, a daughter is *not* one's daughter all the days of her life—what could she do but marry Mr. Burton?" she would cry. She tried to make him happy, and hoped she never failed in her duty towards him: but she felt that the best and brightest of

herself was buried in the graves of her dear Winifred's father, and of others who were gone.

This bereaved condition did not prevent her going a great deal to Winifred's house in London, and profiting by the numerous social advantages which her daughter's position and artistic reputation afforded.

When at all annoyed with Mark, which was often, she would gently hint that his stolid intelligence and singularly unamiable character rendered him quite incapable of sympathising with her beloved daughter's sensitive temperament and æsthetic tastes. When it was Winifred who put her out, she made the equally original discovery that the unstable disposition and visionary intellect of an artist were most unfortunately at variance with the clear insight and unswerving integrity of her delightful son-in-law, a "little grave and cold in appearance, but *so* high-minded." When she felt at cross purposes with both of them, she generally remembered that her good, kind husband, "a man whom everybody must respect," was counting the days until she rejoined him, and then she vanished to Elmsleigh.

But she never went on such occasions without prophesying that the day would come when both Mark and Winifred would remember all that she had said, and be sorry. She also hinted that their regret would be largely mixed with remorse for their treatment of herself; but on this point, true to her practice of "never complaining," she generously forbore to insist.

"You look quite worried, love," said Mark to his wife one day very soon after their marriage, when Mrs. Burton had departed in this manner, in a kind of halo composed of her own wrongs.

Winifred sighed a little, and leant her head against his shoulder.

"It is very foolish of me to mind such trifles."

"By George! I think my mother-in-law is no trifle at all," exclaimed Mark, with more candour than respect.

"Yes, she is. After all, she robs us of nothing of any importance."

"Only, for the greater part of her stay, of all our comfort."

"There are better things than comfort."

"Of course—duty, and patience, and philosophy," grumbled Mark. "I know you are a little Spartan."

"It seems to me that you are neither dutiful, nor patient, nor philosophical," answered Winifred, laughing. "But what I meant is, I assure you, something infinitely less sublime than all that."

"Then what is it?"

"Our happiness."

THE END.

FORTUNE'S WHEEL.

By the Author of "Molly Bawn."

"I DON'T know," returns the girl dreamily, answering some question: but her mind has evidently wandered from it, and is lost in sad labyrinths of its own creation. She is sitting amidst the scented clover—a great grove of pine trees making a fragrant background—and has taken her knees into her embrace. Her large earnest eyes are full of an intensity almost terrible in one so young and fragile, and are fixed upon the break in the view through which the ocean can be seen, as it lies moaning far down below.

In her lap a heap of dying roses are emitting the sweetest perfume. Half-forgotten they are lying there, though plucked an hour agone to adorn the quaint old Wedgwood jars in the drawing-room.

"That I love you?" says the young man who is stretched at her feet upon the grass, gazing into her preoccupied face with a curious intentness. Evidently his prolonged stare distresses her; she flushes delicately, and turns her head away.

"Let us talk of something else," she says with a poor attempt at lightness.

"Afterwards, if you will. But first I must get to the root of your mysterious speech," returns he, shifting his position so as to bring his eyes to bear again upon her averted face. "You have almost told me that you don't believe in my love for you."

"Not quite that."

"Yes, *quite* that, as it seems to me. I want you to tell me why."

"How *can* I? Even to myself an explanation would be difficult; and to *you*——" She hesitates; her head is bent now; her slender fingers are toying nervously with the roses in her lap; the pale flush of a moment since has deepened into a burning crimson. Still pitilessly he keeps his eyes upon her face, as though her childish confusion and distress affords him some inward amusement. With a persistence that amounts to cruelty he watches each variation of her mobile features, finding, in thus studying her transparent mind, a selfish pleasure not to be foregone.

"Go on," he says, evenly. "To *me*——"

"Why will you pursue the subject?" she asks, tremulously, raising her large eyes to his for a moment.

"Because I wish it," returns he, still smiling. Under the smile, however, there is a touch of mastery beneath which she moves uneasily.

"If you will have it, then," she says, "it is this: there are moments when I *think* you love me; there are moments when I

seem to *know* it—but there are many moments when I doubt your power to be faithful."

He throws himself back on the grass, and laughs aloud. Perhaps he has not seen the agony on her young face, or the wistful longing to be contradicted in her beautiful eyes.

"What a baby you are, Vera! And so you think, with the little wisdom bred in your pretty head in this old-fashioned grange—or borrowed from the village down below—you can read *me* through and through, and sift my character with ease. Well! think so still."

"Such thought is torture," returns she in a low voice, desolated by a touch of tenderest passion. "Tell me rather that my doubt is false."

"A taste of punishment will do you good," retorts he, smiling still and pinching her little shell of an ear in a gay fashion. "Tut! let us now speak of that 'something else' you were so eager for a while ago."

A sudden, curious flash lights her eyes—her nostrils dilate. It is but a momentary thing, and then is gone.

"Well, what shall it be about?" she says calmly.

"You, of course; what other subject do I care for?" says Stainer, quickly. Perhaps he has seen that sudden flash.

"You don't ask me what *I* care for?" says the girl slowly, her manner still a little strange.

"Because—was I wrong?—I believed I would be your first thought as you are mine! And, surely, you should take precedence in our discussion."

Her new-born anger dies. A heavenly expression comes to her soft face as she turns it upon him.

"To think you must leave me this very evening!" she says, with tears in her eyes.

"Only for a little time."

"You are glad to go back to your London?"—with a side glance at him full of suppressed reproach.

"I can be glad of nothing that takes me away from you." There is real feeling in his handsome face as he says this. "You know that, at least, Vera?"

For answer, she holds out one hand to him, which he kisses lovingly; and, still holding it, drags himself even nearer to her over the swaying grass.

"Still you love the town," she says, jealously.

"Well—I *like* it."

"Yet when your uncle, over there," pointing vaguely in the direction of some wooded lands on her left, "*dies*, you will have to live down here most of your life."

"I shall have *you* then!" says Stainer.

"Ah! yes. But if you *prefer* the town.—What a pity it is I could not go there with you."

"It wouldn't suit you," says Major Stainer slowly. "You are only

a little violet—the more charming to *me*"—hastily—"for that; but you would, I fear, feel yourself lost in that big world you speak of."

"Not lost, with *you*," says Vera, uncertainly. Somehow her great eyes, resting on him as they do with soft question and wonder in their depths, put him out woefully, man of the world though he be.

"Of course, not in that sense," he says. "But you have no idea how different you are from the women one meets up there."

"Are they so very lovely?" asks the girl, in a low, disheartened tone.

"Not so lovely by half as *you*, most of them, if one goes into it. But it isn't only eyes and mouth and a stainless complexion that carries the day. There is an air about those others that a little country mouse like you, however highly bred, could not acquire for years."

"I cannot see how even the *Queen* can be more than a lady," says the child with pretty dignity, "and surely a Wriothesly may lay claim to that old title."

"Birth and breeding have nothing to do with it," says Stainer, with a touch of weariness. She is too ignorant of the world's ways to understand him. He is unaware that he himself is too ignorant of heaven's ways to understand the sweet soul within *her*. "With these women I speak of, who have spent their days in a whirl of excitement ever since their schoolroom doors closed upon them, you would be misunderstood. You would find yourself miles behind them in earthly lore."

"Could I not learn it?" leaning forward eagerly.

"Better not try. No. The material for that sort of thing was not born with you. You are a trifle too earnest for fashionable life. These others I speak of wouldn't like it in you."

"Not even those æsthetic people, of whom you sometimes tell me? Might not this crime of mine, this earnestness you condemn, be deepened into intensity? If I proved myself 'intense' they should claim me as a sister. Should they not?"

"There would be a trifling objection," says Stainer, laughing again. "*Their* earnestness is all sham, yours a startling reality. Once they found that out they would never forgive you."

"So you think I shall never make a great 'ladye,'" says she, with a smile that is thoughtful.

"Never."

"Yet I should like to try. I would that some fairy sent me a fortune, and a face so fair that all the world should bow to it: then we should see."

He shakes his head. "The strain would be too heavy for you. You are too simple a child to make a sensation in society. Give up all such ambitious views, and wish for something else."

"Then I shall wish for your return, every minute in the day, until we meet again," she says, prettily.

"By Jove! that reminds me," exclaims he, springing to his feet, "I must go at once, unless I wish to miss my train, and I am due at Lady Bland's to-night. Good-bye, my darling, and believe I shall never forget you—*never*, and that the last month, spent in this sweet Devonshire of yours, has been the happiest of my life."

"You did not ask me to remember *you*," says the girl, standing back from him. She is clad in a soft, white, clinging gown, and her hands are clasped loosely before her. Great heavy drops of woe stand trembling in her lustrous sapphire eyes. Her whole attitude is suggestive of bitterest grief and disappointment. She would willingly have gone to him, and clung round his neck, and wept her heart out upon his; but, half-unconsciously, he has taught her that expressed emotion of any kind is in bad taste. "Though indeed there was no need to ask," she adds, with a touch of solemnity in her young voice; "I shall never forget."

"Oh, *that!* I *know* that," he says, with careless, comfortable trust in her affection. And then he takes her in his arms, and at the very last she so far forgets her lesson, as to give Nature sway, and clings to him, and lets him kiss her at his will. And then it is all over; and he goes up to town, finding solace (even as he thinks of her) in a cigar: whilst she spoils her lovely eyes in weeping for him all that live-long night.

He wrote her fifteen letters in all, including one from Calais, where he stopped on his way to Berlin (as military attaché), and then he came to the conclusion that he must marry for money if he meant to keep up the old place as it should be kept—a matter that for many weeks had been troubling him; and then he told himself he was a heartless fellow; and then—he forgot her!

Patti is singing, and deathly silence reigns, save for the grand tones that swell, and fade, and rise again, filling the wide expanse of the vast theatre with a rapturous melody. Through the great hush the music is sobbing—thrilling—holding, as in a spell, the hearts of the mighty concourse. Who shall say what unforgotten memories are brought into vivid life by these charming sounds? What sad but exquisite recollections make the pulses beat? At least they bring tears into the eyes of *one*.

She is quite a young girl: and in her absorption is leaning rather more over the cushions of her box than she is aware. Her whole soul is in her face, which is extremely beautiful.

"Sit back a *little*, dearest; you should think *sometimes*," says a pretty woman, half a dozen years her senior, and evidently her chaperon, tapping her furtively with her fan. "You know how people watch your every movement, and they will not believe—— "

"What does it matter? Let her be happy in her own way," says a young man hurriedly, to the pretty woman, stopping a second message from the fan.

Indeed the girl has been so engrossed with Patti, that the first warning has gone unheeded. Her eyes are full of passionate delight, tinctured with sadness—who is ever "merry when he hears sweet music?"—her lips are slightly parted. Her gown is of costly white silk, broidered with pearls, and she is older, graver, yet altogether strangely unaltered since that time, a year ago, when she sat amidst the fragrant clover and watched the roses dying, and listened, with far-off dreamy gaze, to the plaintive murmuring of the waves as they beat their foamy breasts against the cruel rocks far down below.

Then her "false love" sat beside her: now ——. Her eyes grow dim. Slowly, as though some inward force compels her, she turns them from the stage, and looks into the stalls below. There she sees him!

"Vera!" The voice comes to her, vaguely, indistinctly, as it were through a hazy mist. It is her cousin, Lady Vynor's voice, and it awakes her to the necessity for calm. She is still leaning on the cushions of the box, but now she draws herself up, and leans back, until she is so hidden by the curtains on her side that she is no longer visible to the stalls beneath. Raising her hand she passes it hurriedly across her forehead.

"She is ill," says Lord Digby, hastily. He is the young man who had taken her part a moment since.

"Ah! so she is," says Lady Vynor, in a frightened way. "Vera, dearest ——"

"It is only the heat," says the girl, compelling herself to speak by a passionate effort. "It is really nothing." She leans back again as if exhausted.

"What *is* to be done?" says Lady Vynor helplessly, half rising from her seat. She is a nervous woman, always on the look out for midnight conflagrations and sudden deaths.

"Nothing," says Digby, quickly. "The opera is nearly over. Give her time to recover herself a little, and then take her home. The heat is intense: it is no wonder she feels it."

Indeed, Vera is ashen grey, but has by this time regained a certain amount of composure, and *with* it the knowledge that the old love upon which she had set such store is—*dead:* buried, lost, gone past all recall, in that one brief moment when her eyes had rested upon Stainer's.

Digby, taking a scent bottle from Lady Vynor, presses it into Vera's hand without looking at her. The delicacy, the tenderness of the action falls warmly on the girl's bruised heart. How good he has been to her!—how sincerely he has loved her and obeyed her slightest behest for two long months, without reward or any hope of it!

Twice, Vera had refused him; and twice he had taken her refusal very well, but with an evident determination to persevere in hi

Being an Englishman, he had declined to recognise defeat. And now, indeed, in this hour, does he find his constancy crowned with success. The generosity and spirit, the gentleness that marks him for its own, becomes fully known to her as she withdraws her eyes from that unexpected recognition in the stalls. She turns with a shudder of repugnance from the dark beauty of the false face there, and glancing at Digby, tells herself there is surely beauty greater than the merely physical; so thinking, she says some little kind thing to him that lifts his heart from Hades to Olympus.

To explain to you about Stainer. When his eyes had fully met hers, and he is satisfied that the radiant young beauty, up above, is in very truth the simple child whose love he had played with for awhile and then flung carlessly aside, he turns to the man next him.

"*Who* is that girl in white in the box up there?" he says hoarsely.

"My dear fellow! Not know the reigning beauty of the hour!" says his friend. "That is Miss Wriothesly, the most exquisite creature in England, recognised as such."

"I have been abroad," stammers Stainer, with a poor attempt at indifference. The scent of dying roses, the roar of a far-off ocean is in his ears.

"Ah! just so," says his friend, pityingly. "Greatest mistake in the world to go one foot out of town. They say travelling enlarges the mind. It narrows it to my thinking. The sweet shady side of Pall Mall, and the Row, will teach you all that ever you may want to know—and a good deal more."

"Tell me of Miss Wriothesly," interrupts Stainer, impatiently.

"Don't you see my theory exemplified straight through? If you had stayed at home like a sensible man you would not have had to ask the question. A year ago she was unknown. Then fortune found her. Some forgotten relation in Canada died and left her sole heiress to his enormous wealth; whereupon other relatives suddenly discovered they had for years been pining for her society. Her cousin, Lady Vynor (pretty woman in the box with her), swooped down to the country grange where the girl was buried alive; and, bringing her up to town, flung her upon the world of fashion. A *beautiful* heiress is a rarity. Need I say how magnificent was her success."

"And the man with her?" asks Stainer, with dry lips that almost refuse to speak for him. Vera has now withdrawn from the front of the box, and a wild desire to rise and go to her, to see her again face to face, to hear her voice, is maddening him.

"That is Lord Digby. Good catch, too, and terribly épris in that quarter. Dare say she'll marry him after all, though she has refused him, off and on, it's whispered, ever since their first meeting. They say her maid brings her a bouquet and a fresh offer from him every morning."

"She *has* refused him, then?" says Stainer, a fierce glow of hope

springing up within his breast. The one glimpse caught of her a moment since has waked in him a second love, before which the first seems cold and tame. Can this radiant beauty, with the pure, proud face, be indeed the little fond girl who had told him of her longing to be a great "ladye," and whose aspirations he had so mockingly crushed ?

"Yes. But time works wonders, and most women go down before a title. Perhaps, with her beauty, she aims at higher game : but I should think an earldom ought to count. Oh yes, I've no doubt she'll marry him in the long run."

"*Why ?*" demanded Stainer, so savagely, that his companion pauses to stare at him in simple wonderment through his eye-glass.

"Why shouldn't she?" he replies at last. "He is all anyone's fancy could possibly want to paint, and he is her slave into the bargain. She must be the most ungrateful woman born if she doesn't show grace to him in the end. His love for her has been earnest and faithful !"

At this last word, Stainer winces. How can *he*, whose love has been so *un*faithful, hope for forgiveness ? There had indeed been moments during the past few months when he had suffered his mind to wander to her, and he had thought of her with regret and longing. During these brief intervals he had pictured her to himself as living always with her grandfather in that old-world village, alone, companionless ; dreaming, perchance, sadly of him, "poor little thing !" He grows hot and shame-stricken, as memory brings back to him these vain imaginings.

And now the curtain falls. It is all over ; and rising hastily, with a scanty word of adieu to his friend, he makes for the large hall, where he will see her as she passes to her carriage.

Presently she comes, enveloped in soft cashmeres, white as her own perfect skin, and with her two companions. Lady Vynor stops to speak to some chance acquaintance, and Vera is left virtually alone with Lord Digby. Her hand is resting on his arm ; under the pretence of drawing the cashmere even more closely round her, he lays his own upon it.

"I have been silent for a long time at your command, but I feel I *must* speak to-night," he whispers hurriedly. "Am I to take my final 'No' *now?*" He has turned very pale.

"No," says the girl quickly. Then the absurdity of her answer striking her, a faint smile creeps into her eyes. "That is," she stammers, "it is no '*no*,' I mean, only ——"

"'No *no*'? why that is 'yes' in any decent English," he exclaims eagerly.

"Well, take it," she says in a low tone, and with a glance that is half shy, half tender. "But," with nervous haste, "there is first something I must tell you. To-morrow, if you will come to me at four o'clock, I ——"

At this moment a tall man, dark and handsome, pushing his way, somewhat cavalierly, through the groups, makes for where she is standing. His face is agitated, his eyes are alight. He holds out to her a hand that positively trembles, and after a hesitation, so faint as to be almost imperceptible, Vera lays hers within it.

Yet the hesitation to a lover's eyes has been visible; to Digby it is now quite clear what it is she has got to tell him on the morrow.

"Come, Vera," says Lady Vynor, rustling up to her. Vera makes a movement as if to go to her, but Stainer holds her hand fast.

"I *must* see you; I must explain," he says, with white lips. "Give me time; place ——"

"To-morrow," says Vera, very gently. She is almost tender with him. So softly her glance rests upon him, that Digby's faithful heart loses courage, and he forbids himself to dwell upon the hope that a few minutes since had made his pulses throb with only half-concealed delight.

"Park Lane," Vera is murmuring in a low voice. She is still somewhat lost in wonder at this change that has come over her. Only yesterday she had believed in her love for this man; who, now holding her hand in a close clasp, and looking into her eyes with an impassioned gaze, fails to wake in her the poorest spark of feeling. "Come to-morrow, at three," she says—a suspicion of pity in her lingering glance.

At three o'clock the next day, Major Stainer puts in an appearance in the charming drawing-room in Park Lane that calls Lady Vynor mistress. He finds there awaiting him not only Vera Wriothesly, but the former pretty little lady likewise.

To her cousin, on her return from the opera last night, Vera had confided all her story—concealing nothing—and confessing to feeling a disagreeable amount of nervousness about the interview impending between her and her former lover.

"Go to bed, and don't let *that* trouble you," said Lady Vynor. "I have not come to my age, I hope, without being able to outwit a man. There; leave all that to me."

Now, seated in her favourite lounging chair, wreathed in smiles, Laura Vynor betrays fine determination to out-sit her visitor—with a smiling obtuseness to any desire for her departure, beyond all praise.

She is almost effusively amiable to Stainer—welcoming him as an old friend of Vera's. And so he has been at Berlin for a whole year! How delightful! He can now tell her (what she has been all her life so longing to know) whether Kaiser Wilhelm is as popular as one has been led to believe. And so on.

Stainer, bending in sulky silence, answers all her questions somewhat at random. His eyes are fixed upon the perfect profile of the girl sitting half inside the lace curtains of the window, and his mind is wandering to days, now past and gone, when her love had been his own

beyond all doubt. *Her* eyes never once seek the room, but are turned upon the busy world of carriages outside. One hand is lying idle in her lap, the other is lazily furling and unfurling a huge black fan. The curtains so far conceal her, that Stainer cannot see her expression, and so is unable to judge whether she is, or is not, as anxious to be rid of her talkative cousin as he is.

The moments, stealing all too swiftly by, tell him it is drawing very near to four o'clock, and that *even* an "old friend" must not inflict himself upon anybody for more than an hour at a time.

He has consigned Lady Vynor to regions impolite, and has half risen to take his departure, when an interruption occurs that compels Lady Vynor, bon gré, mal gré, to leave him alone with Vera. The mission on which the servant summons her admits of no delay.

When he has closed the door behind her he goes quickly to where Vera has been sitting. She has come out from the curtains, however, and is now advancing towards him.

"At last I can speak to you alone," he says, with a passion in his voice she had never heard there in the old days. "What tortures I have been enduring ever since that moment, last night, when once again my eyes looked into yours! And you, Vera—you cannot have forgotten *all!*"

"I have forgotten nothing," says the girl gravely.

"Ah, it is not so easy to forget," cries he triumphantly. "And you—you have a heart. You must still feel ——"

She interrupts him by a slight but eloquent gesture.

"I am not heartless indeed," she says; "and I have felt—*too much!*" There is a quiver in her sweet voice that misleads him. In truth, the emotion it expresses is not for him, but for the memory of those past dark hours when she had mourned so truly for a love, now known to be worthless.

"All may still be well with us," exclaims he, eagerly. "I love you now as I never loved you then. My silence during this past year I can explain. I ——"

"*Can* you?" says Vera, not severely, but with a steady glance from her great violet eyes.

"I can—I will," declares he, wildly. "I was mad then—blind. But surely the love you once bore me will help you to forgiveness?"

"The love you killed? Do you appeal to *that?*"

"I swear ——"

"Nay, no more false oaths," interrupts she again with a weary movement. "They will be useless now. The love you speak of is dead, slain by your own hand: if indeed," dreamily, "it ever existed."

"Not *dead*," entreats he with extreme agitation. "Do not say that. Give me a fresh trial—one last chance ——"

"Too late!" returns she in a low, but firm voice. Outside she can hear a step upon the stairs that of late has grown very

familiar to her. The colour rushes back to her pale face, as she turns towards the door. It is flung open rather impetuously, and Digby enters the room.

Their eyes meet; but, seeing her standing close to Stainer in apparently agitated converse, Digby comes to a standstill, and looks at her with a terrible reproach in his beautiful eyes. This look fades, however, and gives place to one of ecstasy, as she goes quickly up to him, and frankly holds out to him both her hands.

Leaving them still in his warm clasp, she glances back to where Stainer is standing, as if rooted to the ground.

"Major Stainer," she says with an odd little thrill in her soft voice, "Let me introduce you to—to my future husband, Lord Digby!"

Training enables Stainer to acknowledge the rather distant bow made him by Digby, but the sense of utter defeat is crushing him. He has grown haggard and aged in these last few minutes. He mutters something about an engagement, seizes his hat, and bows himself out, without permitting himself to look into her face, even once again.

"Vera, you *meant* it?" says Digby, when they are alone. He is scarcely less agitated than the man who has just left the room.

"I did," returns she tremulously. "It is but a poor gift, but if you want me, I give myself to you gladly."

"With this gift that *you* call poor, what man on earth shall be so rich, so blest as I?"

"Best hear me first," whispers she. "Do not take me until I have told you all. Last night," in faltering accents, "I met ——"

"Not another word," says Digby gently, "I know everything. That man who has just gone—you—you ——"

"I was engaged to him," says Vera simply, though with very troubled eyes. "And he went away, and forgot me. I—I thought I loved him then; but last night, when I saw him again ——"

She breaks down here, and bursts into tears. Digby taking her into his arms, presses her head tenderly against his breast.

"Don't cry, sweetheart," he says, with passionate fondness. "If you tell me you have discovered that your love for—for *him*—is still alive, I"—bravely—"shall try to bear it."

"Oh, no! not *that*," exclaims she, shuddering slightly. "I felt then nothing but wonder that I should ever have known even a childish affection for him. I knew that old silly story was at an end for ever; and"—shyly—"I knew something else too."

"What, Vera?"

She can feel the tender arms around her tremble. Leaning back from him she looks softly into his eyes.

"That I loved *you!* she says, pressing her pretty flushed cheek against his.

THE WEALD OF KENT.

ROUND ABOUT GOUDHURST.

By Charles W. Wood,

Author of "The Cruise of the Reserve Squadron," etc.

Old Houses in the Weald.

As every nation has its own peculiar type of people with their distinguishing traits and individualities, so most countries have special characteristics in the way of scenery. The rugged barrenness of the North is contrasted by the luxuriance of the South. Norway discloses its endless hills and valleys. There pine forests flourish, the air is scented with the healing turpentine, and the ground is strewed with cones. Mile after mile, and day after day, you may wander and lose yourself in these vast solitudes, which might be untrodden by the foot of man. If you are alone, the silence becomes sometimes almost appalling. You raise your voice and do your best to break the stillness and receive an answer. It is in vain. No echo responds, no frightened bird flutters from its nest, not a chirp is heard. It is death in life.

Far up, perchance, you see an eagle soaring towards heaven, almost a speck in the blue canopy above you. Suddenly he wings his flight earthward, and descending on mighty pinions, wheels round and round the summit of yonder mountain until he finally settles and you have lost him for ever. You go on your way. Dried and dead leaves and branches and bracken rustle and crunch beneath your foot with that exquisite sound, that sense of freedom and wild nature, only to be appreciated by those whose days are passed in busy towns and hard work, and to whom these enjoyments are the exceptions in life. All these influences are bracing to mind and body; the air

is keen and invigorating; morally and physically the people of such a country should be above par.

Passing from North to South, you have your contrast. The utmost beauty in nature. A soft luxuriance that charms the eye; a radiant atmosphere that steeps the senses in dreamy ease and indolence. It is inexpressibly delicious, but enervating. Therefore its people are luxurious and effeminate; full of fire, passion and impulse that, yielded to, lead too often to shipwreck.

Again, the snow-capped mountains of Switzerland, flushed with the rosy light of sunrise or sunset, stir you to your utmost depths. You feel transported above worlds and principalities and powers. You think these regions, whose beauty is more of heaven than of earth, ought to be eternal. Its people also should be capable of all that is high and noble.

Yet again, lower down, there is the richness of Spain. A luxuriant vegetation. Blooms that dazzle the eye and amaze you with their brilliancy and profusion. A people so handsome and graceful that they ought to be perfect in all other ways. For, ought not gracefulness of form to be allied with purity of spirit?

All these countries stir within you whatever is emotional. They rouse you to enthusiasm. You long for the eagle's wing to soar above all summits, and command the beauties of the world. The lightness of the air, the dazzling sunshine, the high, pure, deep blue sky, all these things intoxicate you. You are a new creature; life, for a little time, is full of charm and happiness. If one could always have this—and eternal youth—and that rarest of heaven-sent blessings—perfect companionship!

It remains for England to put forth beauties essentially her own. Beauties that do not raise you to wild moods and highly strung emotions, but quiet the spirit like the calm of a summer's evening, when the sun, sinking westward, tips the fleecy clouds with the glory of angels' wings. The intense glow in the west suggests that the gates of Paradise have been opened for a moment; and the dying light never fails to bring to mind a day when your own sun will go down, and your life's work will be over, and through the night of death and time you pass to the full morning of eternity.

The beauties of England, I have said, are peculiarily her own. They belong chiefly to the calm and peaceful type—somewhat resembling her sons: save that in them you meet with a slight suspicion of sluggishness and apathy, nowhere found in nature.

For a want of enthusiasm is undoubtedly typical of an Englishman. If not a flaw in his character, it is at least a misfortune. He does not miss it, or make a trouble of it, or even suspect its absence, for we can only understand Shakespeare by the Shakespeare that is within us. For all these virtues—imagination, originality, the sacred fire of inspiration—wise folk tell us a mixture of Celtic blood is necessary. For this reason the Celt will always feel himself somewhat alien from

the pure Saxon. He is thrown back upon himself by the cold, formal hand clasp, the reserve seldom withdrawn, the difficulty of passing from conventionality to the more intimate life. It has its good side, no doubt—le revers de la médaille. But if a man is never to show any heart or sympathy, he may as well be without them, just as the man who never draws upon his account might as well be without a balance at his banker's.

But to our text.

We have not to speak of all the beauties of England, but of one little spot in particular. It is a spot worth writing about, and worth cultivating. Those who know it, love it; those who do not know it, may easily see and learn for themselves.

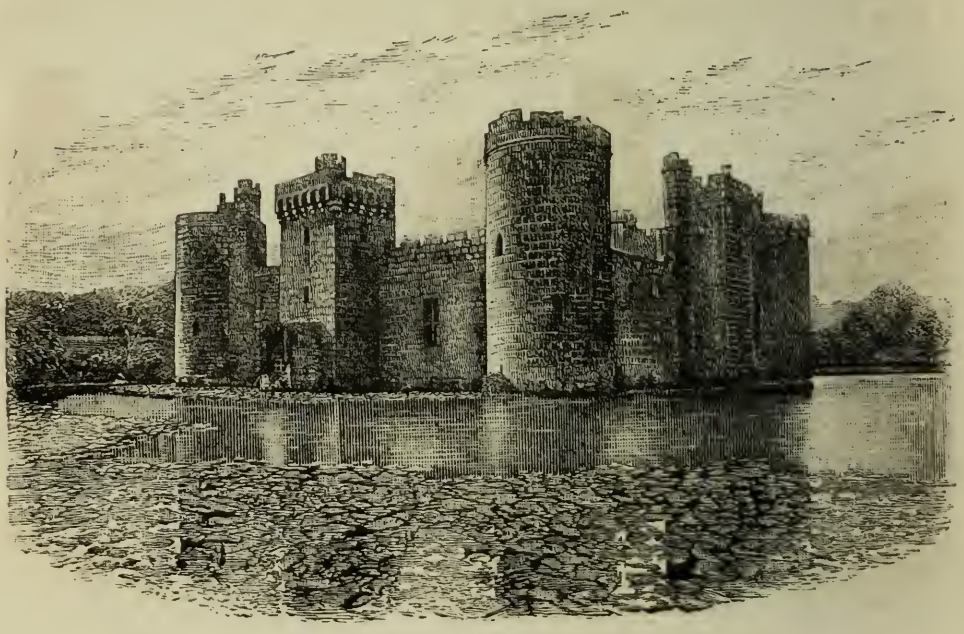
I wonder if there ever existed any one being, Dr. Syntax included, who had searched for and discovered all the hidden beauties of England? Unless a life were devoted to that object, it would surely take far more than the intervals of ordinary leisure to find them out, learn them by heart, and love them. To know them, indeed, must be to love them. They are our birthright and possession, just as much as our English blood is inherited. We are drawn to them as naturally as we turn to the mother whose sweet face and gentle voice has been our haven of rest through life; our ideal of all that is lovely and of good report from the hour when she first bent over our cradle, and gazed into our wondering eyes with a look that is a reflection of the divine love. We are in sympathy with our English scenery, and love it as a close friend. The scenes of distant lands are grander, more majestic, more moving; they affect us in quite a different way.

But in this paper I have not to refer to anything hidden in the way of scenery. It is not far away or difficult to find. It does not place its light under a bushel. On the contrary it is set on a hill. It is open to all the world; very open indeed, for it would be difficult to find a greater sweep of country or a more lovely.

Kent is said to be the garden of England, and a certain Primate once added: "Then Goudhurst must be the garden of Kent." I do not think he was far wrong. The whole neighbourhood of Goudhurst is singularly beautiful, with the sylvan, pastoral beauty that is England's great characteristic. I know few spots that have lovelier and more diversified drives, drive after drive in succession. A friend remarked to me the other day—and I agreed with him—that he could read Scott's novels throughout his life, beginning again with the first when he had come to the last. I think the same might be said of the drives round about Goudhurst. You never tire of them. A drive taken for the tenth time will open up points never before observed. Every feature necessary to the charm of landscape is here —with one exception. The exception is serious, for it is water. Some writer once said that a landscape without water was like a woman without poetry. I hardly think the simile will hold good, for

there is certainly nothing prosy about the neighbourhood of Goudhurst.

The village is straggling. Genius itself could scarcely have made it more irregular. It is built in great part on the slope of an eccentric hill—one of the highest hills in the Weald—and approaching it from the south you see a collection of red roofs one above another, picturesque and promising. Goudhurst is nearly 500 feet above sea-level. This sounds childish and tame in comparison with the 6,000 feet of elevation in the Engadine, but it is sufficient for our purpose. It makes the air pure and bracing. Go there broken in health, nerves unstrung, one foot in the grave, and the chances are that your foot will soon be once more on solid ground, nerves and health



BODIAM CASTLE.

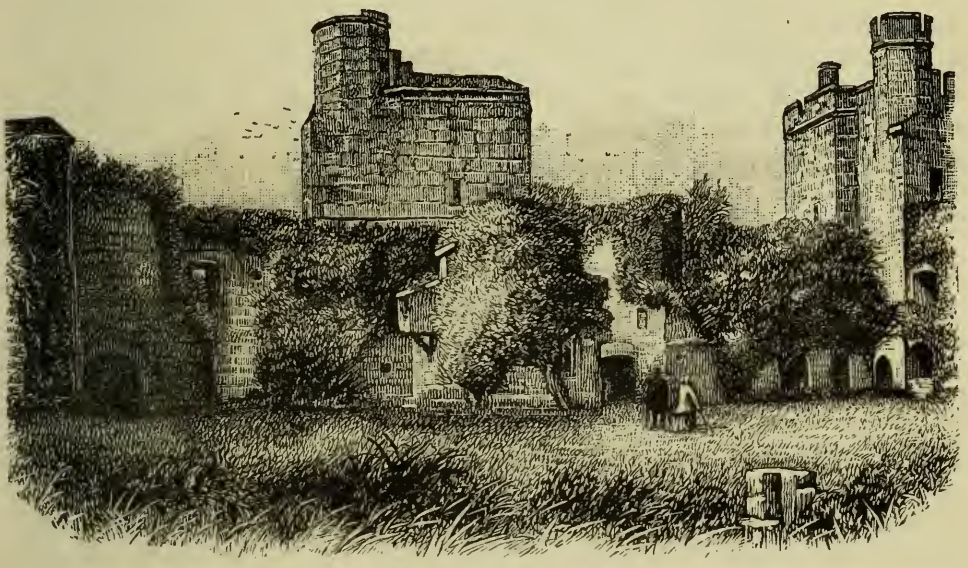
restored. These draughts of fresh air are the finest medicine in the world, at once invigorating and a delight. They reach the seat of the evil as surely as they are heaven sent. Nature makes no mistakes.

Passing up the steep village hill, it strikes you as an uncomfortable place to live in, but delightful for a sojourn. Of course the natives stare as you go by as if you were a travelling circus or a Wombwell's Menagerie. They always do, everywhere. It appears to be the privilege of the English rustic, though I do not know that it is confined to England. A Philistine standing at his door disappears and returns with two or three other spirits like unto itself to gaze at the passing equipage and deliberate as to its occupants. Are they only driving through; or have they come to inhabit the neighbouring property so long vacant? or, are they merely visitors at one of the places in the neighbourhood? You begin to wonder uncomfortably what there is about you. Is your hair too short and are you

mistaken for an escaped lunatic? or is your nose too long, and are you taken for a Puritan?

Whatever it may be, the horses dash on unconcernedly, and you forget everything except that the village houses look quaint and old. There are little bits here and there that ought to drive an artist wild with delight. Indeed the whole neighbourhood is studded, at intervals more or less distant, with ancient and picturesque houses, that, faithfully represented on canvas, would become pictures of beauty and a joy for ever.

At the summit of the hill you come to the church, ancient, large and interesting, but in need of restoration. From the tower you may count sixty-eight church towers and spires. A field divides it from the old vicarage, in which the vicar pointed out to me rafters



INTERIOR OF BODIAM.

and ceilings that have stood their ground for centuries, and were in existence when Goudhurst was more important and populous than now, though, it may safely be asserted, not more interesting. For in days gone by it was the seat of the clothworkers, and the whole place, busy and noisy, was given over to sale and barter. Here, too, was laid the scene of James's "Smugglers." Thus Goudhurst has had a strange, eventful history. All that is now past. The quietness of inaction, the humdrum life of agricultural interests—this is the Goudhurst of to-day.

From the summit of the hill you have a view scarcely to be equalled, stretching far as the eye can well reach. It undulates on all sides with those graceful curves, whose absence would be far more fatal than the absence of water. The landscape is richly timbered. There are woods on all sides. Exquisite retreats, where at mid-day you may be lost in their shelter, throw yourself amidst the

bracken and watch the glinting of the sun through the leaves and branches. The whole scene sparkles with a light and laughter that make you joyous in spite of the burden of care, the fret of life, the grasping at shadows, the missing of substance, all that is so crooked in the world, so hard to bear, so difficult to be understood.

For a moment you have found happiness. Everything around you is divine—in its strict and reverent sense be the word used. The blue sky comes to you here and there through the trees. A soft breeze is fanning your cheek, and rustling the glinting leaves with a sound, soothing and delicious, of the far-off sea. Here and there a bird warbles his best; the sweet, sad note of the blackcap, the fuller song of the thrush, the distant trill of the lark.

You close your eyes for a moment and take in the mental impression. It is a divine scene and experience. You open them again to find a young pheasant staring at you. He wonders what you are, so still and motionless, so very unlike himself. After a quiet stare, during which you move neither hand nor foot, he struts away as calmly as if there were no 1st of October, no sport to awaken cruel echoes in the wood. Whether he has gone off to consult his tribe as to the new discovery, or to bring back his House of Parliament to chatter, wrangle, look wise and leave the matter where they found it, remains an unsolved question. He does not return. The wood is a labyrinth without any silken clue, and he may have lost his way.

You are in perfect harmony with all inanimate nature; you long to be in harmony with all that is animate. If only you had Thoreau's wonderful gift, so well described in that singularly interesting little book by Mr. H. A. Page, "The Life of Thoreau."* He whistled, and the birds came to him in numbers, fearlessly and lovingly. He took them up in his hands and they showed no alarm. So with the fishes. He put his head under water, and they all swam to him. He took them out, stroked them, and gently placed them back. The curse pronounced between man and beast for him seemed removed. He lived in a millennium of his own. Would he have had the same power over the fiercer beasts of the forest? What was his secret? In what lay his charm?

We, lying in these sylvan solitudes, have no such charm and secret. The birds come not, though we played upon the pipes of Pan, and whistled with a magic reed.

I can never forget one Sunday morning standing at a certain gate in the highest part of Goudhurst, waiting for the bell to cease before entering the church. A lovely face has yet times when an indescribable something heightens its charms a hundredfold. So with a landscape. There are days when a peculiarly rarefied atmosphere lights it up with unusual and startling effect. I had never seen it so lovely as on that morning; I never saw it quite the same on any after day.

* "Thoreau: His Life and Aims." (Chatto and Windus.)

A vision of far-off wooded undulations. Here and there villages reposed and church towers and steeples nestled amidst hills and trees and valleys. The plains below were divided into innumerable fields intersected by hedges that again so distinctly form one of England's beauties. Fields yellow with golden grain blended with the green of rich pastures. Every shade seemed there. The hills were slightly veiled in a purple haze. In every direction the fast ripening hop gardens bore promise of an abundant yield, that would have been fulfilled but for the fatal storm of the 2nd of September. It was a perfect pastoral scene; one of those views, I believe, to be found only in England.

"And all the air a solemn stillness holds." It was so that morning. The peculiar stillness that seems to distinguish a Sunday above all other days. It may be only fancy; or it may be that the spirit unconsciously attunes itself to the day, and in itself holds the calm; or it may be nothing less than reality. The wings of work and activity may fold themselves, the rustle cease in the air, a divine rest and peace shed itself abroad. I don't know how and what it is. But the feeling is there, and I think the fact is there also.

Nothing this morning broke that stillness of the air, save the tolling of the "parson's bell," announcing the near approach of service. The fine peal Goudhurst possesses had ceased, the solitary bell would soon cease too. It was difficult to leave such a scene. The blue sky, the smiling landscape, gilded by this glorious sun, read one a more eloquent sermon than the highest flight of the greatest preacher that ever lived.

Yet when the bell stopped, I felt that "conscience doth make cowards of us all." So, convicted of cowardice, I went my way, entered the fine old church, and took my place. But they were in the middle of the Psalms, and I felt that the reader on beginning "When the wicked man," must have looked pointedly at the vacant seat, and drawn all eyes to bear testimony to the fact that one of them at least was conspicuous by his absence.

The hop gardens I have just mentioned are a great feature in the scenery of Kent. When they have grown tall and luxuriant, and hang in graceful and abundant clusters round their training-poles, then a hop garden is one of the prettiest sights in England. It is far before the vineyards of France and Germany, in which, indeed, it is difficult to discover any great beauty. Only here and there—as in Southern Tyrol, or North Italy—is one's dream of a vineyard realised. There the vines are trained upon trellis work supported by tall poles, and the leaves grow above, and the rich ripe bunches of fruit droop below. Round about Meran—that earthly paradise—you may walk under the shelter of the vines, safe from the blazing noon-day sun, and eat the daily complement of fruit necessary to the "Grape Cure." Acre after acre, mile after mile, you may trace that rich carpet of vine leaves, and feel how favoured is this land of the sunny south.

But—to abandon invidious comparisons—the hop gardens of Kent have a special beauty of their own, most conspicuous when looked down upon from a slight elevation. Enter the gardens, and their charm evaporates. Too close a familiarity in their case, as in many another, doth breed contempt.

Presently they are ready for picking. Seed time and harvest, summer and winter, all have their appointed season. On the roads you now meet startling caravans, peopled with gipsy tribes more or less barbarian. Yet if you go amongst them, they are, as a rule, civil and decently behaved, will not attempt to insult you, or even use a coarse speech in your presence. And they have some good in them—who indeed has not? A gentleman who occasionally attends them in hours of need and danger, told me they were grateful for what is

BUNNY'S FAVOURITE LAWN.

done for them. How often do we meet with gratitude in those who would consider themselves infinitely above these wanderers?

Sometimes we find the caravan brought up by the wayside. The horse, taken out of the shafts, is making as good a meal as the grass and hedges will furnish. Like the alderman of historical renown, he "widens at the expense of the public." The gipsies have squatted upon the bank and are enjoying the luxury of a steaming loving cup: in other words of a tin saucepan that apparently contains a hotch-potch by no means to be despised.

The caravan finds its final destination in the corner of a field. There it may remain in single blessedness, or it may be joined by three or four more caravans all bent upon the hop-picking mission. In fine weather it must be the most delightful of existences. The very work itself is a source of pleasure. The people are well paid; they breathe the pure air; the very scent of the hops makes them eat, drink, and sleep even better than common. They have no cares,

pay no taxes. If they choose, they may live peaceably amongst themselves. All their modest needs are supplied. What more could mortal wish for ?

But the hop-pickers are not all gipsies, nor by far the greater part. They turn out of London in crowds. The lowest denizens of the worst slums can work, and down they go. Imagine for a moment the change from a stifling court and room, where the sun never shines, pure air is never breathed, and cleanliness is unknown, to sudden transportation to one of these hop-gardens. What life and health it must bring; what a holiday and happiness. The greater portion accept it insensibly, no doubt. But amidst this multitude there must here and there be a nature to whom this yearly exit is an unutter-

Looking Westward to the Sunsets.

able blessing. Even they, probably, could not analyse their emotions, but they are raised physically and morally by the influence, and good is done for all time.

There is a large band of what are called "regular hands." When the farmers are ready for them, they write up to London, and surely the letters carry with them a perfume of green fields and new-mown hay. Then these regular hands (it sounds like a title or an honourable institution) lock up their town houses and depart for their country seat. They turn out bodily, men, women, and children, and great is the exodus, and terrible the inroad at the other end.

Special trains are put on; and if, gentle and refined reader, you saw the motley crew literally tumble and bundle out upon the arrival platform you would never forget the sight. There is a certain type of humanity, of feature primitive and irregular, of limb coarse, clumsy and ill-shapen, that seems almost a humiliation to mankind; but I

suppose it is not so. There is the potter's clay and there are the vessels of gold and silver, and all have their use and destination.

This type is necessarily prevalent amongst the hop-pickers. A good many of them, it is to be feared, are also gifted with a moral obliquity of vision. We were strongly cautioned against them when they first began to assemble. They creep round to side doors and beg—and they need not beg. They are able to earn their living at hop-picking, and save a good deal besides. Many when begging will also borrow, without any intention of returning the loan. A silver spoon is just as well in their pocket as out of it; an umbrella is useful in rainy weather; and the ruling power of the kitchen will presently find herself minus a cloak or a bonnet that once hung gracefully behind the door with a comfortable sense of possession.

So they would come, and it went to the cook's heart—a most amiable and impressionable young woman—to say them nay in obedience to the warnings that if she began to give, her peace of mind would be gone for ever. Occasionally a pitiable object (as a rule the more pitiable the less reliable) would move her to compassion. In the middle of a game of lawn tennis, at a critical moment perhaps, a figure might be seen hurrying across the lawn, and dropping a curtsey, wait for the sceptre of petition to be held out to her.

"Oh! if you please, sir—a dreadful object—wants a bit of bread—or a penny or two—looks starved, sir—hungry and nearly naked—What *shall* I do?"

"Use your own discretion," was the only possible reply. "But remember your responsibilities. Since the hop-pickers came down, have not many umbrellas disappeared, and has not the plate-basket diminished in weight?"

Then confusion and a hasty retreat, and whether or not the "dreadful object" received its demands became a secret in which we had no part or lot—beyond the authorship of original supplies.

It was a charming little place, this tennis-ground and its surroundings, not far from the village of Goudhurst. Velvety lawns embowered in green trees, and beds bright with many coloured flowers. Here we spent many days this year; saw the Midsummer sun set, traced the sad devastation of the 2nd of September, witnessed the pheasant's doom. The house was old-fashioned, rambling, picturesque, and very pretty. For two hundred years or more it has witnessed the not always quiet annals of the neighbourhood. The hall is of dark oak, and the fireplace on the left is large enough to roast an ox. But in its old age its use has been turned to beauty, and it enjoys an honourable superannuation. There are all sorts of rooms and staircases in out-of-the-way corners: delightful irregularities after the stiffness of modern houses.

The lower rooms opened on to lawns and flowers and graceful trees. From the upper drawing-room one caught exquisite views of far off hills and vales. Many a sunset have we watched from those

western windows; seen many a flood of gold fade to crimson and die out in twilight. Roses bloomed and scented the air. In a distant walk, honeysuckle and hopbine trailed over arched trellis work in a half-cultivated wilderness fashion wholly delightful. Hidden seats abounded. You could spend hours lost to the world, even the limited world of your own personal and human property, so near at hand. Twenty times a day you might change your seat according to your mood: whether you desired sunshine or shade, solitude or society, repose or the small excitement of social life. In the distance we hear the merry voices of two boys playing lawn tennis. We have met them before in these pages, but that was a year ago and across the water. Presently there is a lull. Tired with their two-handed match, they have departed in search of recruits. These quickly found, they begin once more. Merriment is greater than ever, and we, deep in an interesting volume, misanthropically retire out of sight and hearing.

On the lawn, not far away, is a rabbit that would gain a first prize and a gold medal at a show. He is so tame that he perfectly well knows your voice and footstep. When he catches sight of you he runs up like a dog. If you call him by name he frisks about and jumps into the air, and wheels round. Altogether he is so funny that you shout with laughter, until he looks up to see what it is all about, and frisks again, unconscious that he is the object of merriment. His ears sweep the ground, his eyes are bright and soft and look at different people with a distinctly different expression. He has his favourites, and his prime favourite of all may do anything with him.

Bunny came to us one day shivering with terror, panting with emotion. He implored to be taken up, and nestled away out of sight as if he meant to stay there for ever. But of one thing he was persuaded—whatever danger had threatened, no harm should or could assail him in his present quarters. Then it got rumoured that Bunny had seen a stoat, the wicked creature had given chase, and but for our being at hand, Bunny might have come to a sad end.

So the under-gardener set a trap for the stoat. But the wise creature went away, and instead—alas!—there was caught the loveliest squirrel ever seen, with an exquisitely formed body, and bright dark eyes, and a splendid sable tail. Its little foot was hurt, but not broken, and we hardly knew whether we did right in obeying our first impulse and letting it escape. It was impossible to kill it. The trap was opened and it darted like lightning into the trees, where, let us hope, it has recovered and is happy again. But the offending trap was banished, and Bunny was informed that he must in future defend himself from adversaries seen and unseen.

I have spoken of the unusual beauty of the drives in this neighbourhood. Their name is legion. In a country so undulating as the Weald of Kent, the roads are necessarily hilly. Therefore your horses

must be strong, well fed, willing, and pull well together. Two horses of which I write were named Charley and Tommy, and were altogether excellent; as indeed they could not fail to be in the hands of Edwin Gaskin, most admirable of coachmen. If Charley had a fault, it was a fondness for shirking his own share of work, for which, sometimes, he had to be brought to book. But Tommy never grumbled. He was the better bred horse; the gentlest of creatures, yet full of energy and spirit. There is a good deal to be said in favour of breed, not only in the matter of horses. In the long run it wins the day. Tommy would take sugar out of your hand as daintily as if it had been picked up with a pair of tongs; Charley was more impatient, less delicate. One night when he could not quite get up

CRANBROOK.

the sugar, he said he would have a finger tip instead. The finger, however, remained in its place, with only a slight proof of Charley's playfulness. He, probably, would have called it a mark of affection.

I think horses enjoy driving just as much as their friends and masters, especially if they possess an eye for the picturesque. Everything here was beautiful; the very roads we passed through, and without reference to the views beyond. Long country lanes with high banks and hedges far above our heads, rich with wild roses and honeysuckle. Not infrequently the trees arched and interlaced, and, passing through these temples of nature, one caught flashes of sunshine and blue sky. Woods on either hand, planted with young oaks and firs, suggested shady nooks for picnics and quiet rambles. Then suddenly we would emerge from the high banks upon a marvellous sweep of country, its chief characteristic richness and variety of verdure.

Take for instance the view on approaching Goudhurst from Marden.

You are nearing the summit of the hill; the village houses are at hand. You look westward and the declining sun is casting shadows over the landscape. The sky has the flush of sunset. Light, fleecy clouds—it is a north-west wind—are floating quietly across the heavens. You gaze over a great stretch of country; a scene so beautiful that you can only feel in silence the impression it makes upon you. Far-off hills, dark with rich woods, rise as gradually as the slopes of a park. The valley is broken up into fields, pale stubble running into the rich green of the hop gardens. They have just carried the harvest and the hops are being picked. As a rule the harvest comes two or three weeks before the hops, but it was not so this year. Just below, you see the pickers still at work, but in a few minutes they will leave off for the night. Men, women, and children

QUEEN'S HOTEL, HAWKHURST.

are all contributing to the general fund. Where they have finished, the ground already looks bare and brown, the poles are lying in rows. It has a cold, melancholy aspect, suggestive of wreck and ruin.

Sweep the eye across these fields and slopes, this laughing valley. About two miles away, nestling in fine timber, a picture of peace and beauty, you see the church tower of Horsmonden. If you wend your way thither, just before reaching the church, you come upon the third largest oak in England. At the very entrance of the churchyard you find a magnificent and marvellous walnut tree. All record of its age is lost, but it must have seen the rise and fall of centuries. It is so old that it has taken to a stick and is propped up with a support that is a tree in itself, and seems to have become a portion of the walnut. The trunk is enormous and very curious. The branches are low and far-spreading. It bears much fruit.

Amongst the drives, that to Hawkhurst is one of the most favoured.

Hawkhurst is another village or small town set on an hill, almost the prettiest round about, and in quite an advanced state of civilisation. It is much more important than Goudhurst, much larger, and has far better hotel accommodation. Goudhurst in this respect is wanting.

Soon after leaving Goudhurst, you pass on your right the beautifully wooded slopes of Glassonbury. Down in that hollow, well hidden by trees, is a real moated house, which carries you back to past and very different days from these. Farther on is the turning to Cranbrook, the parish that is said to grow the finest hops in England. They pay no tithes. Is this a rare instance of the reward of merit, or merely another illustration of the proverb that the ripe apples always fall in the orchard?

If you are going to Cranbrook, you sweep down a long hill and reach a quaint, old-fashioned little town. At once your attention is arrested by some wonderful old houses on the right, dating back to the days of the Flemish clothworkers. Passing through the town to the Staplehurst road, you see a little house embowered in quite a large garden, bearing over the doorway the inscription "My Lady's Cottage." You wonder whether it would disclose a touching tale of romance, or of heroine worship, or of a life's devotion, or merely the humdrum annals of some good old Darby and Joan.

But to-day our destination is Hawkhurst. We pass the Cranbrook turning and keep on our way. Before long we shall see in the distance the spire of a church crowning a hill. There is the limit of our drive.

But we vary our route, and turn out of the direct road. We reach a sign-post and read: Goudhurst, 5 miles; Hawkhurst, 2 miles; Hastings, 18 miles; Sandhurst, 3 miles.

We turn into the Sandhurst road. It is narrow and picturesque and rather broken; a series of fair pastures, and grassy slopes, rising woods, and young plantations. Onwards for about two miles, and we reach a small settlement of houses; the abodes apparently of extensive washerwomen, if we may judge from external appearances. The fattest of old ladies takes up all the road and stops our progress, whilst she has a tug of war with a small but self-willed child. Of course the child is victorious. The old dame has no longer any breath for active exercise. As we pass, she lifts pathetic eyes full of melancholy protest at the troubles of life and the undue healthiness of this pure air.

We quit the Sandhurst road and turn to the right. After a few yards of sharp ascent, which Charley and Tommy take as if up-hill work with them were not the thing it is with men and women, we reach the high, level ground of Hawkhurst. The views to the right are distant, sweeping and magnificent. We pass a large red-brick house with rich lawns, and splendid trees. On the left we see one smaller but more interesting. This last is called Hawkhurst Place. It has a history attached to it, full of romance and deeds of

daring, and smuggling escapades. The neighbourhood furnishes tales of terror and enterprise, and of cheating the revenue; of underground passages, and secret caves, and bricked up wells; plots that would give material for a hundred novels, make your flesh creep with horror and excitement and a wild longing to have taken part in some of those bygone, midnight adventures. But they belong to an age and condition of things passed away, never to return. The world has grown narrower since then, or—which comes to the same—distances are more easily compassed.

Just beyond this old house we come, on the right, to the Queen's Hotel.

The first time we passed it quickly, without stopping. The afternoon sun glanced upon it, and I thought I had never seen so pretty, so picturesque an inn, with its old-fashioned windows, and walls covered with a profusion of rich creepers. What a paradise, we all agreed, in which to spend a week or two, quietly exploring the neighbourhood, revelling in bracing air, sunshine and country life. Not long after, when we modestly found our way there in a small pony carriage, and took 5 o'clock tea, whilst the pony rested and recruited, we saw no reason to change our opinion.

It was impossible not to feel how delicious it must be for anyone tired of London, weary of work and wanting a few days' repose, to run down here and ruralise, and acquaint himself with the neighbourhood. If this were only done a little oftener, how many a break down would be avoided! The station for Hawkhurst is Etchingham.

Turning to the left, you presently enter the road leading to Bodiam Castle. Going along one day we could but wonder and admire and look back at the wonderful views behind and around us. At the Junction Inn we turned to the left, and, sweeping down a steep hill, reached the Red Lion at Bodiam.

The inn is primitive and insufficient for the needs of the place, but the landlord does all he can by attention and civility to make up for what is wanting. Next year he thought they would build him a new inn, and certainly it will not be too soon. I think he said that in the season they sometimes have as many as fourteen drags there at one time. People come from Hastings and from all parts of the neighbouring country.

There is fishing in the little river Rother, hard by, and the Red Lion will take you in, and in a little sitting-room upstairs make you as comfortable as circumstances will permit, whilst you pass your days in the open air on the banks of the stream, in the exercise of reverie and patience.

Opposite the Red Lion are the stately ruins of Bodiam Castle, dating back to the fourteenth century. You pass down a short road, as ill-conditioned as a road can be, and reach the greensward surrounding the pile, which stands on a slight elevation. The castle is surrounded by a broad moat filled with water, in parts covered

with the grand leaves of the water lily. You go round to the entrance and a woman comes down from a small cottage to receive the admission fee of sixpence, devoted to some county charity. From the exterior, the castle looks almost as perfect as it must have looked in its early days. It is nearly square, with a round tower at each angle and a square one in the middle of the east, west, and south sides. But, passing over the drawbridge and beyond the ruin of the old barbican tower, we find the interior has long since fallen into old age and decay. It is not very large, but it is very picturesque. Ivy clings to the crumbling walls with all the beauty of age, romance, and history. It should be full of the spell and charm that envelops and surrounds these ancient ruins wherever they exist. So it would

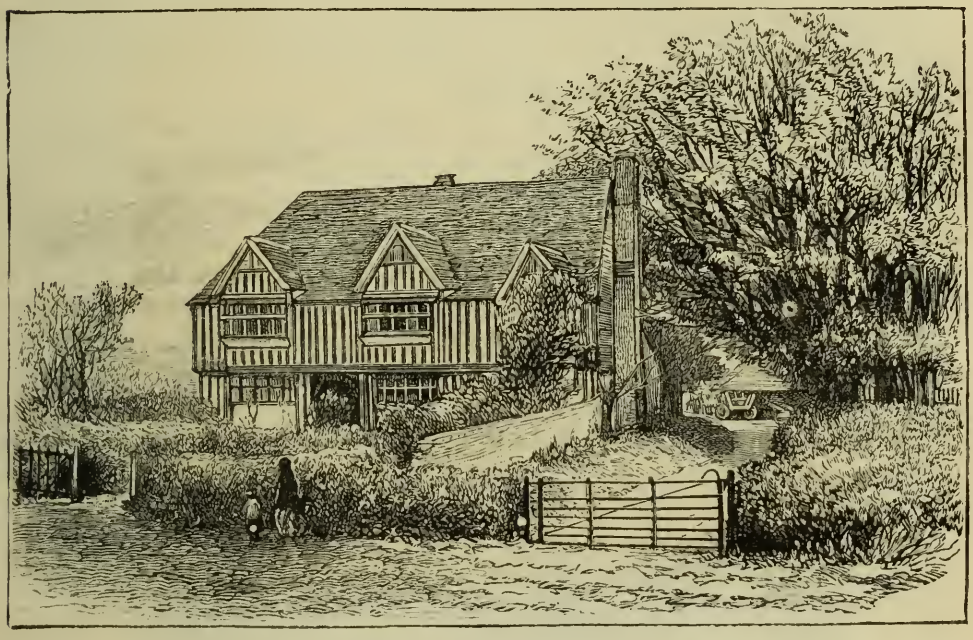
An Old Nook in Goudhurst.

be to-day. But beneath the shadow of chapel window and decaying wall, and under the summer sky, are spread luncheon tables. A large amount of loud mirth and talk, distinguished by a strongly metropolitan accent, is going on. All the subtle influence of the place has evaporated. The solemn silence and dignity of centuries have fled affrighted. Champagne corks re-echo; a plate crashes to the ground; one or two dogs bark and yelp; two or three exuberant spirits have started a sort of impromptu hockey. Everyone is in the height of enjoyment. One may say that they have taken possession of the place, for it is impossible to move about without a feeling of intrusion—though the intrusion is not on our side. Such things ought not to be. There are shadowy trees and no end of greensward beyond, and as much privacy as those who come here to eat, drink and be merry could surely care for.

We were not sorry to escape to one of the towers for thoughts,

views and impressions. There I stayed long; even when those with me had returned to the Red Lion for luncheon. A slight accident had made me lame for the time being, a cumberer of the earth, a tax upon my friends' arms and patience. So I moved about as little as possible.

The view was extensive, but less beautiful than many of the views in this neighbourhood. True we had now left the Weald of Kent, and were in Sussex. A long stretch of green fields, through which ran the Rother; sloping hills, crowned here and there by a well-placed house; the church of Bodiam, of which nothing but the tower could be seen rising above the hill. To the right were the few houses of Bodiam, the Red Lion facing towards me. Altogether, though the



HAWKHURST PLACE.

castle itself was a noble pile, the country would not stand comparison with Goudhurst.

Homeward bound, we varied our route. Instead of turning to the right at the Junction Inn, we kept straight on. Presently a wonderful view opened up on the left, surely one of the most extensive and beautiful England can boast of. We looked over into Sussex. Far away in the horizon lay the Downs and the shimmering sea. One almost smelt the salt air. The intermediate valley was broken up into vast sections of fields, woods and villages. Here and there solitary houses, and church towers and spires arrested the eye as it swept over the landscape. As we ascended, so more and more the valley seemed to expand and disclose fresh beauties. The summit of the hill was crowned by a windmill that would sorely have tempted the fighting propensities of Sancho Panza.

Onward now, towards Hurst Green; through the neat and flourishing village of Flimwell: finally reaching Bedgebury Woods. The gatekeeper opened to us, and we passed into the loveliest drive imaginable. An endless extent of sloping banks and plantations of firs, bracken and gorse. The pheasants were running about in tantalising numbers. Presently, turning to the right and leaving one or two lakes behind us, we passed a field where Indian cattle were grazing, and another enclosing the loveliest Alderney cows ever seen, with dainty, delicate legs and feet. Passing the house and skirting another lake, where once stood a house visited by Queen Elizabeth, we presently reached another lodge. The old woman opens for us and we carefully enquire after her bad leg and duly sympathise with her inability to go hopping this year. And then once more on the Goudhurst road.

A steep hill brought us to the village pond and the village itself. Sweeping down hill, past that exquisite view to the left already described, home was quickly reached.

Charley and Tommy were almost as bright and brisk as when they had started in the morning. The drive had been as delightful as a drive can well be, one grand scene and impression passing away only to give place to another. But the neighbourhood abounds in them. For a short walking tour near home—especially when the hops are rich and ripe—no spot could be better chosen or more charming than the Weald of Kent. I might describe places almost ad infinitum, but space has already passed its limits. Some day, perhaps, I may endeavour to go yet further into its beauties.

In the meantime, the reader will do well to make their personal and intimate acquaintance, and so reap unto himself a rich reward.

A Calm Retreat.

THE SECRET OF BERYL MANSIONS.

By the Author of "In the Dead of Night."

I.

HAD I been my own master at that time and able to do as I liked in the affair, the probability is that I should never have taken up my residence in Beryl Mansions. As matters were, however, I had no choice. My Uncle Tobias was at the trouble of engaging the rooms for me, as he was also at the expense of furnishing them. After that, of course, nothing could be said, more especially as it was owing to his influence that I had obtained the situation to which I had just been appointed in a well-known London bank.

But, indeed, I found my rooms in Beryl Mansions far more tolerable than at one time I had thought possible. In the first place they were central, in the second they were quiet, and in the third place I could go in and out as I pleased without being interfered with by anyone.

Beryl Mansions were situated in a narrow street which formed an artery between two other streets running from the Strand to the river, which, at the time of which I write, was still without its Embankment. The Mansions formed a cul-de-sac, and reached from the street through a covered gateway which bore on its front, deeply cut in the stonework, the date 1717. The houses were substantial, well built, and dated back to about the same period as the gateway. There was an air of decayed gentility about them, as though they had seen better days. They were let out in floors to different occupants, I, Edward Dimsdale, being the tenant of two rooms on the first floor of No. 3—the third house on the left as you entered from the street.

The custodian, rent-collector, and general factotum for all matters relating to the Mansions was a round, rosy, elderly man named Daniel Ivy. It was from him that before long I came to know nearly all he could tell me about my neighbours and fellow-lodgers. In every case the ground floors of the houses were rented as offices of one kind or other, and were consequently occupied during the daytime; Ivy and his wife tenanted two or three small rooms in the gateway itself. The other occupants of the Mansions, those who slept there and made their homes there, consisted of men of various ages and different occupations, as was to be expected among a handful of individuals brought together as neighbours by sheer accident in the heart of a great city.

"You are our youngest lodger, Mr. Dimsdale," said Ivy to me one day; "and we have only one lady living in the Mansions, and she's a foreigner."

"And who is she?"

"Her name's Ma'amselle Latour, and she lives with her father on the first floor of No. 2—the house next yours, sir. A sallow-faced young lady, not very handsome, but very ladylike and civil."

"And Mademoiselle Latour's father?" I said, questioningly.

"What is he, you mean, sir? That's just more than I can make out," responded Ivy. "He puzzles me, and it isn't often I'm puzzled about any of my lodgers. And between you and me, sir, I can't say I like Monsieur Latour over much; what's more, my missis don't like him. He's too sly, sir, coming in and going out at all hours of the day and night, sometimes dressed like a reg'lar lord, at other times like a common working man, in a suit of clothes I wouldn't give half-a-sovereign for. Curious, sir, I take it?"

"Very curious, indeed, Ivy. I presume that Monsieur Latour's daughter does not keep these strange hours?"

"Wet or fine, every day but Sunday, Ma'amselle leaves the house at half-past ten to the minute, and every evening she gets back about six. Me and my missis have put it down that she goes out as governess—teaching music or French, maybe. Ma'amselle's right enough, sir, and, as I said before, she's remarkably civil."

Ivy knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and then proceeded to refill it.

"There's Mr. Lydford, now," he resumed. "He has the rooms on the floor above Monsieur and his daughter, and he is what I call a real nice gentleman. You'll know him at once when you see him, sir. He's getting on for sixty. Tall and thin, has white hair and whiskers, and dresses a little old-fashioned, but as neat as a new pin."

"In some bank or office in the city, probably?"

"No, sir, as far as I can make out Mr. Lydford is his own master, and hasn't anything particular to occupy his time with. He is a very bookish man. There are heaps of books in his rooms, and he's always bringing fresh ones home. I think you would like to know Mr. Lydford, sir," added Daniel, with a sly look at me.

"Probably. I am a lover of books myself in a small way."

"I don't mean that, sir. But you might like to know him because of his pretty niece who comes to see him every two or three months. I shouldn't be a bit surprised, sir, if you were to fall head over ears in love the first time you set eyes on her."

"But I should be very much surprised myself, Daniel," I answered dryly. "Why don't you find me as pleasant a neighbour as Mr. Lydford for the empty rooms on the floor above mine. It is lonely of a night with no one in the old house but myself."

Ivy puffed at his pipe in silence. "That's another queer thing," he said at last. "As you say, sir, the rooms over yours are empty; for all that, they are not to let."

"Not to let! How's that?"

"Well, sir, they had been standing empty for some time, when one

day, about fifteen months since, a gentleman came and looked at them and took them on the spot. The name he gave was Bevan, his references were a firm of lawyers in Bedford Row, and he paid me a quarter's rent in advance. Next day a lot of furniture was sent in, and a few days later Mr. Bevan called again. The rooms were not wanted for himself, he said then, but for a nephew who was about to return from foreign parts. This nephew might arrive any day, or not for a month or two; in any case, the rooms must be in readiness for him when he reached England. And now comes the queer part of the story, sir. Fifteen months have gone by since, and the nephew has never put in an appearance to this day. The rooms are still locked up and empty."

"Have you not seen anything of Mr. Bevan in the interim?"

"Yes, sir, he has called three or four times. It was in April when I saw him last. He looked over the rooms, as he always does. And when I asked when we might expect the gentleman, he said matters of business had detained him longer than he expected: that was all the answer I got, and it's pretty much the same answer that he's given me before. The rent's always paid a quarter in advance, my missis opens the windows and dusts out the rooms once a month, and then the keys are hung on the nail again over my fireplace, ready to be handed to the traveller whenever he may come for them either by day or by night."

Somehow after the date of my gossip with Daniel Ivy I no longer seemed to feel myself so much a stranger in Beryl Mansions as before. I began to regard the dingy old houses with different eyes. The elements of mystery and romance were about me, even among those grimy walls; as they are about each and all of us if we only know where to look for them.

II.

It was not long after this that I saw Mr. Lydford for the first time. Daniel Ivy's description of him was fairly accurate. He was tall and thin and stooped a little, as many bookish men do. He wore an air of abstraction as he threaded his way through the streets as though he were cogitating over some abstruse idea, or working out some difficult problem. But he looked a man whose acquaintance I should like to make.

Mademoiselle Latour I also saw, and that before many days were over. She was a thorough Frenchwoman in dress, style, and carriage, from the artificial rosebuds in her neat little bonnet to the tip of her dainty boots. You may any day see in Paris a hundred women like her, even to the high cheek bones, the sallow complexion, and the beady, quick-glancing black eyes. The expression of her face was by no means an unpleasant one, especially when she smiled and showed those perfect teeth of hers; and when she had discovered that I was a denizen of Beryl Mansions, and her next-door neighbour, she always

favoured me with a smile and a little nod when we passed each other; in return for which I lifted my hat as politely as would one of her own countrymen.

Of Monsieur Latour I saw nothing for several weeks, but his comings and goings were so erratic and uncertain that it was scarcely to be wondered at. When I did see him I was not prepossessed in his favour. The honest, homely instinct of Daniel Ivy and his wife had not been far from the mark, or so it seemed to me. The expression of his close-shaven face, taken in conjunction with that of his eyes, gave one the impression of a man who was cruel, cold, and hard, down to the very foundations of his being. No: the less I saw of Monsieur Latour in the future, the better I should be pleased.

Summer gave place to autumn and that in turn began to fade into winter, and still the rooms over mine remained silent and tenantless. Mr. Bevan's nephew did not come.

I wished he would. As the nights of the coming winter grew longer, the old house of which I was the solitary tenant after dark grew more weird, gloomy, and ghostlike. Those midnights in my room were very lonely when the fire had burnt low, and all outside sounds had died away. I would have given much to hear a footstep on the stairs, or to know that in the rooms above or below there was one human being either awake or asleep.

It was about the middle of November, when one night I sat alone in my room as usual. The fire was nearly out, the clock on the chimney-piece was on the stroke of one, I had done reading and was smoking a last pipe before going to bed. I was gazing dreamily into the dying embers and calling up home scenes of long ago, and the faces of dear ones far away, when suddenly I was startled into the most vivid life by the sound of footsteps in the room immediately above. I sprang to my feet. I all but dropped my meerschaum in sheer amazement as I listened. Yes, there could be no mistake. For the second time the footsteps crossed and re-crossed the floor, then there was a sound as though a heavy chair or other piece of furniture was being moved, and then all grew silent again.

"He is come at last," I said gaily to myself. "And I am glad of it."

An event so important necessitated an extra pipe. As I smoked it the thought all at once struck me that I did not hear him arrive. I had certainly not been asleep or even dozing. Assuming that he had brought no luggage with him, it was strange that I had not heard him ascend the stairs, pass my door, and mount to the floor above. But no sound had broken the silence of the house, until that of the footsteps overhead. The more I thought about it the less I could account for the mystery.

I sat puzzling my brains till past two o'clock, but did not hear the footsteps again. The silence remained as unbroken as though the third-floor tenant were still thousands of miles across the sea. More

than once I asked myself whether it was possible that my ears had deceived me—whether the sounds I had heard had any existence other than in my own imagination. But they had been too real: and when I at length turned into bed it was in the firm belief that the old house had found another tenant at last, the mystery of whose silent arrival would be solved in the morning.

I popped my head into Ivy's little room on my way to business. "So the long-looked for one has come at last," I said. "You were very sly about it, Ivy. Not a word, not a hint even, when I saw you last evening."

Daniel Ivy looked up and stared at me with an unmistakable air of bewilderment. "I must be dull this morning, sir," he replied, "for I don't in the least know what you mean."

"Nothing very particular, Daniel. I only thought you might have told me you were expecting Mr. Bevan's nephew last night."

"But I wasn't expecting him, sir. And what's more, if I had been expecting him, he didn't come."

"Not come!" I exclaimed. "What do you mean? He was walking about his room at one o'clock this morning."

Daniel looked at me as if he thought I had taken leave of my senses. "Do you see that, sir?" he asked, pointing to a key which was hanging over the chimney-piece. "Without that key nobody could get into the rooms over yours: unless they broke open the door."

This staggered me a little, but I was not going to give in. "Key or no key," I said positively, "there was certainly some one walking about the room at one o'clock this morning."

At this juncture Mrs. Ivy called to her husband. I looked at my watch, found that I was late, and hurried off without further delay.

When I returned home in the afternoon I kept out of Ivy's way. The second night would surely prove whether I was right or wrong. And yet the more I thought of the matter the more impossible it seemed that I could be in the right when I had seen the key of the room hanging on the nail, undisturbed. Evening deepened into night, the outside noises gradually died away, and except for the faint rumble of a passing vehicle, or the hollow echo of a footfall now and again in the paved court, profound quietude reigned over Beryl Mansions.

Ten o'clock; eleven o'clock; twelve o'clock; and still the silence in the old house was unbroken. There had been no sound of anyone passing up stairs or down; no noise of doors being opened or shut; no footsteps pacing overhead. I began to think that, after all, my imagination must have played me false. But this waiting and watching grew dreary. I stirred up the fire, and put my bachelor's kettle on the hob.

The little clock on the chimney-piece struck the half-hour after midnight. Ah! as I live, there it is again, just as if it had been

waiting for a signal! The unmistakable tramp of footsteps directly over my head. From side to side they pace slowly and without hurry, not once or twice, but near upon a dozen times in all: then silence again. What will Daniel say in the morning, I wonder?

After listening for a few minutes longer, I opened my door with as little noise as possible and stole downstairs, and so out into the open air. Had there been a light in any of Ivy's windows I should at once have summoned that functionary and imparted to him my second experience there and then. But all was in darkness.

As I stood in the middle of the court my eyes went up instinctively to the windows of the rooms over mine. There, too, to my intense surprise, I saw that all was dark. I rubbed my eyes and looked again. Not a glimmer of light anywhere except from the window of my own room. The mystery was deepening.

The first streaks of dawn were beginning to broaden in the east before I fell asleep, but not another sound of any kind had reached me from the mysterious stranger.

Daniel Ivy was standing in the archway when I set out for the bank, as if he were waiting to intercept me. "Good morning, sir," said he at once: "were you troubled with the footsteps overhead again?"

"Yes, Ivy. I heard the footsteps last night even more plainly than the night before," was my grave reply. "As surely as you are standing there some one was in the room over mine both on Monday and on Tuesday night."

Daniel's jaw dropped; he stared at me with glassy eyes. "Help us and save us!" he stammered. "If what you say is true, sir, and I don't like to doubt your word, then the room must be haunted. There's nothing else for it."

I shook my head in silent protest. If the sounds I had heard were caused by a ghost, it must be by a ghost of very substantial build indeed. "I should rather put it down to a thief, Ivy, than a ghost."

Daniel gave me an injured look. "Wait one moment, sir," he said; and with that he went indoors and returned with the key in his hand. He would examine the rooms there and then, but only on condition that I accompanied him. I agreed, and promised not to breathe a word about the affair to his wife. For once in a way I should be half-an-hour late in reaching the bank, but I did not doubt that for once in a way I should be excused.

We retraced our steps across the court to No. 3, and began to ascend the stairs. What Daniel was about to do was obviously not to his liking. Upward we went till my door was passed, and then higher still till we reached the upper storey and came to a stand at the door of which we carried the key. My pulses beat a little faster than ordinary as we stood there for a few moments waiting for Ivy to regain his breath. Then at length the key was inserted, the handle turned, and the door flung wide open.

The room was in total darkness, and I fancy that we both entered

it with some little trepidation. Daniel, however, at once made his way to the window and drew back a pair of heavy curtains, and then proceeded to draw up the blinds. It at once struck me that no gleam of light could possibly penetrate outside a window covered up inside as that one was.

The bright morning light came streaming in. I gazed around with curiosity. The room was plainly but comfortably furnished, without any pretensions to taste or elegance. A horsehair sofa on one side of the fireplace, an easy-chair on the other; a centre table, a small sideboard, a tolerably stocked bookcase in a recess next the chimney-piece, and a few cane-bottomed chairs.

The room might have been occupied the previous night, or not for a year. But against the former supposition was to be set the fact that everything was in what is called "apple-pie order"; not a chair was out of its place; not a lamp or candlestick was anywhere to be seen; while the fire was laid ready for lighting at a moment's notice.

"Exactly as the missis left everything when she was here a fort-night since," said Daniel, somewhat reproachfully.

There were two doors in the room in addition to that by which we had entered. Daniel opened one of them, and I saw that it led into another dark room. As before, he proceeded to draw back the heavy curtains. The room proved to be a bed-chamber. The bed with its snowy coverlet was there ready for an occupant; towels, with the mangle creases still in them, lay across the horse; on the wash-hand-stand was an unused cake of soap. "Nobody been here just lately, I reckon, sir," remarked Daniel.

Putting back the curtains as he had found them, Ivy then opened the door of the second inner room. This room lacked both curtains and blind, and was entirely empty. A glance around assured me that no one could have gained access to the rooms but by the stair-case. But I put the question to Daniel.

"There's no other entrance to these rooms save by the staircase that you come up," he replied, earnestly. "Are you satisfied, sir?"

"Quite satisfied, Daniel."

Without another word, he crossed to the window and began to draw down the blind. At that moment my eye was caught by a corner of something white protruding from under the sofa cushion. I lifted the cushion, and found that it was a portion of a newspaper which had apparently been thrust away there out of sight. I took it up and turned it over without thinking much what I was about, when my glance fell upon something that startled me as I had rarely been startled in my life before.

The newspaper I held in my hand was only two days old!

I stared and stared at it again to make certain that my eyes had not deceived me. No, there could be no mistake as to the reality.

To-day was Wednesday; the date of the paper was that of the preceding Monday; and it was on Monday night I had first heard

the footsteps. I put back the newspaper where I found it, just as Daniel was drawing the heavy curtains across the window, after which I walked out of the room, and went downstairs deep in thought.

Some instinct, some feeling—I hardly know what—impelled me to keep my discovery to myself for a time.

That the room had had a visitant in the dead of night I could no longer doubt; at the same time, I was firmly persuaded that Daniel was altogether innocent of any connivance in the affair. What, then, could be gained by telling him of this discovery? It would only serve to flutter his nerves more than they were fluttered already. At present the secret was my own. I would endeavour to fathom it without help from anyone; when I should fail in doing so, it would be time enough to seek counsel from others.

But what could the mystery be? How could the intruder gain access to the rooms?

III.

Night after night, morning after morning, I lay awake listening for a repetition of the sound of the mysterious footsteps overhead; but time went on till weeks had gone by, and all my listening was still in vain. It was unaccountable.

But most things come to him who can afford to wait; and wait I did, night after night, with a sort of grim patience, feeling assured that before I had done with it I should fathom the mystery that at present baffled me.

And so, by-and-bye, it fell out that my patience was rewarded. It was a dull and heavy December night, with the soft rain falling silently outside. I had dozed off on the sofa, and had been asleep nearly an hour, when I awoke suddenly to find that it was past two o'clock, and to hear the slow, regular tramp of footsteps overhead. I started to my feet, as wide awake in an instant as ever I had been in my life. I listened, hardly breathing while one might have counted twenty, and still the slow pacing overhead went on. Then I crept to the door of my room, opened it noiselessly, and ventured on to the dark landing outside. Here I stood listening again. I could still hear the footsteps, but very faintly. Leaving my slippers, I began to climb the stairs one by one, and came to the landing above. Step by step I drew closer to the door of the mysterious room, until my fingers rested lightly on its panels. Not the creaking of a board, not a sound of any kind had betrayed my presence. The darkness was intense. I looked for a thin thread of light shining from under the door, but I looked in vain. Half kneeling, I laid my ear against the panel of the door. More plainly than ever was now the sound of the pacing footsteps. There was something weird about that measured, muffled tread in the locked-up room in the dead waste and middle of the night. I shuddered while I listened. Who was this mysterious

being who obtained access to the room without anyone knowing how, and who left it after the same unaccountable fashion? And with what object was he there at all? After all my waiting and listening, was I any nearer the heart of the secret than I was the first time the sound fell on my startled ears?

I had not stirred when the footsteps ceased. The silence that followed was broken, after a few moments, by a low, wailing, inarticulate cry—the cry of a soul in despair, if ever I heard one. Then silence again. I waited longer, but the death-like stillness of the old house remained unbroken. Then I crept down to my own room, feeling sad at heart.

I am afraid that my duties next day received but a very divided attention at my hands. My strange experience of the previous night dwelt in my thoughts to the exclusion of almost everything else. It behoved me to do something in the matter, but what that something ought to be I was at a loss to decide. I had a call to make after leaving the bank in the evening, which took me half a mile or more out of my ordinary way. That off my mind, I turned into the nearest restaurant to dine, and sat down at the first table at which there was a vacant chair, a waiter handing me the menu. Having given my order, I found time to look about me, and could not help a little start of surprise when I saw that my vis-à-vis was none other than my next-door neighbour, Mr. Lydford. I had never spoken to him, and felt sure he did not recognise me, but went quietly on with his dinner, dividing his attention between it and a newspaper which he had propped up against a decanter close to his plate. I liked much the expression of his face, and it was probably this which induced me to ask myself, "Why should I not take Mr. Lydford into my confidence, and crave his advice? He, too, may have heard the footsteps: the locked-up room is only divided from his room by the thickness of a wall." The idea commended itself to me as the right thing to do.

I waited until he was trifling with his cheese and rusks, and then introduced myself to him by name as his next-door neighbour. He held out his hand with the frankness of an elderly man towards one so many years his junior. "I thought I knew your face, Mr. Dimsdale," he said, "but could not call to mind where I had seen it. I am pleased to make your acquaintance."

Talking further, it came out, to the surprise of both of us, that many years before Mr. Lydford had been intimately acquainted with an uncle of mine, who was since dead. This fact at once put me at my ease with respect to what I wanted to tell him.

"May I ask whether you are aware that the rooms next those occupied by you—that is to say, the rooms on the same floor, but in the next house—the house in which I live—were let, and furnished ready for occupation, some eighteen months ago?" I said abruptly. "The person for whom they were engaged has hitherto failed to put

in an appearance, and they have remained locked up from that time to this. Rather curious, is it not?"

He was balancing a cheese-knife absently between his thumb and finger when I began to speak, but he put it down at once, and turned his dark keen eyes full upon me. For a moment or two he seemed to be pondering my question. Then he answered slowly:

"As you say, Mr. Dimsdale, it *is* rather curious; but London is a place where many curious things happen."

"But I have not yet mentioned the strangest part of the affair."

"Indeed! What is that?"

So I told him everything, as I have told it here. No one could have listened more attentively than he. "And now you ask me for my advice in the matter," he said, when I had done.

"I do," I replied, "if you will kindly give it me. The responsibility seems to me one that ought to be shared with others."

He smiled a little at this. "Possibly you overrate the responsibility, Mr. Dimsdale. In any case, my advice is, that you take no definite action of any kind for the present. Wait and see what further comes of the affair. It is seldom well to mix yourself up in business that does not really concern you. Let the mysterious footsteps come or go: what matters it to you? There are secrets on every side of you, if you only knew it, and this is only one more added to the number."

I had asked Mr. Lydford for his advice, and I felt bound to abide by it. Under the circumstances it was possibly the best that could be given, yet it was not quite what I had hoped for.

Mr. Lydford turned the subject by calling for a bottle of wine, telling me that we must drink a glass together to the memory of his old friend, my uncle George.

"One question, sir," I whispered when the waiter had gone for the wine. "As you have not said so, I presume that you never heard any sound of footsteps in the room next yours?"

Mr. Lydford shook his head. "I have the misfortune to be slightly deaf," he replied. "Such a noise as the one you have spoken about would never be heard by me."

IV.

It was on the third afternoon after my interview with Mr. Lydford that we met again. I was turning the corner of a street not far from home when I felt someone tap me on the shoulder; I looked round, and there was Mr. Lydford, with a young lady on his arm. I felt at once that this was the pretty niece of whom Daniel Ivy had spoken in such enthusiastic terms. But pretty was hardly the word to apply to her; she was more than that. Tall, fair, and stately, with eyes the colour of a summer sea in sunlight, and a wealth of golden brown hair, Mabel Gilmour seemed to me then, when first she broke upon my vision, as gracious and beautiful as one of the fabled

goddesses of old. But what struck me much, was the strange melancholy that filled her eyes—strange, that is, in one so young—and that gazed out at you from their dark blue depths and that lurked like a shadow behind her smiles. There was a sadness, too, about the lines of her mouth which caused her to seem older than her years. "Her life holds some great sorrow," was my involuntary thought.

Mr. Lydford introduced me. Then he added: "If you have nothing better to do this evening, Dimsdale, come to my rooms about eight, and bring with you that flute whose dulcet notes I have had the pleasure of listening to more than once. Both Mabel and I play a little, and we may perhaps be able to manage a trio."

Such an invitation needed no pressing to secure its acceptance, and at five minutes past eight I knocked at Mr. Lydford's door with my flute under my arm. That evening was one of the happiest of my life. Miss Gilmour played the violin and her uncle the violoncello, and they both played in a style that put my poor performance to the blush. Two or three times I caught Miss Gilmour's eyes fixed on me with an expression in them I was at a loss to understand. It had nothing to do with the music; I felt sure of that. The look was rather one of quiet scrutiny, as though I interested her in some way to me unknown, and she was endeavouring to arrive at some conclusion respecting me in her own mind. I was not idiot enough to think her interest in me had its origin in any other feeling than curiosity. With me it might be, and *was*, a case of love at first sight; but something seemed to tell me that Miss Gilmour had far more serious objects than love-making wherewith to occupy her thoughts.

When the evening came to an end, we shook hands and bade each other good-bye till our next meeting, which, as Mr. Lydford said, would probably not be for a couple of months at the soonest. "But I promise you this, Dimsdale," he added, "that when Mabel is next in town and has an evening to spare, I will let you know, and then if you and your flute do not join us, it will be your own fault."

All my dreams that night were of those deep blue eyes, that with all their sadness were yet so beautiful.

Under the influence of this newer and sweeter influence which had crept thus unexpectedly into my life, it seemed only natural that the morbid fancies, as to the mysterious noises in the room over mine, should fail to occupy my thoughts so frequently as heretofore. But glad though I should have been to forget all about them, it was not fated that I should be allowed to do so.

One morning, about a week later, I found a letter on my table, addressed in an unknown hand. The writing being evidently that of a lady, I opened it with a feeling of curiosity. The contents, however, proved startling enough to turn my mild curiosity into full-eyed wonder. Here is what was written :—

"Sir,—It having come to the knowledge of the writer that you have been disturbed at various times by hearing strange noises at

midnight in the empty rooms immediately above those occupied by yourself, for which you are unable to account; and that you have spoken to different individuals respecting the noises in question, and are endeavouring to trace the origin of them, you are hereby most earnestly requested and entreated to proceed no further in the matter. You will, the writer feels assured, not fail to accede to this request, when you are told that a family secret of a most painful and terrible kind, involving the happiness of several innocent people, depends upon your absolute silence in the affair. In due time all shall be revealed to you—what to you at present seems so unaccountable shall be fully explained. Meanwhile, the writer relies upon your kindness of heart and your honour as a gentleman, to keep inviolate the trust which is placed with implicit confidence in your hands."

. There was not any signature to the document, or anything to give a clue to my unknown correspondent. The first thing I did after recovering from my surprise, was to endeavour to call to mind how many people in all I had told about the footsteps. Beyond Mr. Lydford and Daniel Ivy, I could remember but two. One of them was young Macintosh, a fellow clerk, and the other, an old friend from the country who called upon me at my rooms, and with whom I went one night to the theatre. From which of these four persons could the writer of the letter have derived his or her information? Not from Mr. Lydford certainly, I decided without a moment's hesitation. Perhaps not directly from any one of them, but from some other person at second or third hand to whom the circumstance had been told as something curious and out of the common. In any case, it was a point, respecting which all the speculation in the world was scarcely likely to land me at any definite result. I would have liked to lay my strange communication before Mr. Lydford, and ask his opinion with respect to it, but the terms in which it was written, if I made up my mind to carry out the wishes of the writer, were such as left me no option in the matter. I felt that the trust thus imposed upon me was a sacred one, and that, however much my curiosity might be excited, the secret must be kept.

Upon reaching home two days later, I found a brief note from Mr. Lydford, asking me to look in upon him as early as possible. I hurried off at once. As I ascended the stairs M. Latour was coming down. He raised his hat and stood aside for a moment to let me pass. "Good evening, sir," he said, with that detestable smile of his which displayed the range of his sharp, white, wolfish-looking teeth. I muttered something in reply and hurried past him, taking two stairs at a time. Knocking at Mr. Lydford's door, I turned the handle, and went in. Mr. Lydford came out of his bedroom; he had his coat off, and was washing his hands. "Sit down; I will be with you in two minutes," he said, in his cheery way, and went back to complete his toilet.

I crossed to the window, but there was nothing worth looking at

outside, so I sauntered back to the fireplace, over which hung a choice etching or two that would repay scrutiny. While standing thus, my eyes were attracted to the chimney-piece by something which was lying there. It was a post-letter with the address uppermost. I gave a great start when my eyes fell on it, and then I looked at it a second time more closely than before.

The address was in the same handwriting as the mysterious letter I had received two days before!

Again I looked, in order to satisfy myself that I was not mistaken. But that was impossible. There were certain peculiarities in the caligraphy which proved that both documents had been written by one and the same person.

I stole back to the window with a sort of guilty feeling at heart, as though I had surprised a secret which it was not intended I should know; and there Mr. Lydford found me a minute later when he entered the room.

It turned out that a ticket had been sent him for the Opera for that evening, and he thought I might like to make use of it. I did not fail to thank him. "You have no time to lose, so I will not detain you now," he said. "By-the-bye, I had a letter from Mabel this morning, in which she desired to be remembered to you. I hope to see her in town before we are many weeks older."

Having promised to go to the Opera, I went, but I am afraid that for once Meyerbeer's dramatic strains fell on unappreciative ears. Later, when I got to bed, I found sleep an impossibility. I could only lie and puzzle myself over the strange and inexplicable turn that events were taking. If the letter I had seen on Mr. Lydford's chimney-piece was from Mabel Gilmour, then was my letter also from her.

V.

A WEEK or ten days passed without any thing occurring. Then came an evening, the events of which I can never forget.

I had been engaged late at the bank, and did not reach home till long past my usual hour. I brewed myself some green tea, and was lounging in my easy chair over a novel and a pipe, when the little clock on my chimney-piece struck eleven. The night was still young, and I settled down again with a sense of cosy enjoyment for two more hours of undisturbed reading. But I had not turned over more than a couple of leaves when down went novel and pipe on the table, and I sprang to my feet. Once more the footsteps were overhead!

It seemed to me that this time I could distinguish the footsteps of more persons than one. Never before had I heard them so plainly. I made a step or two towards the door, and then drew back, remembering the letter and the earnest entreaty conveyed in it. The secret was not my secret, and I had no right to pry into it. Still, under such circumstances, it was not possible to go on reading

and smoking as if nothing were the matter—it was not possible to help listening for what might happen next.

What happened next was this: I heard the bolt of a door shoot back, and then I heard footsteps coming slowly down the dark stairs. I stood immovable, with one hand resting on the table, staring at the door. Would the footsteps stop at my landing, or would they go lower down? They stopped. Then came a quick, low, impatient knocking, and before my husky voice could say, "Come in," the handle was turned, the door pushed open, and there, framed by the black void behind him, stood Mr. Lydford, pale and troubled. One step forward I made, and then stood still.

"You will, I am sure, pardon this intrusion when I tell you the cause of it," he began. "I am in very great trouble, and I am here to crave your assistance."

"You may command my services in any way and every way, Mr. Lydford."

"I knew it, otherwise I should not be here. At present the moments are too precious to allow of any lengthy explanations. This, however, I may tell you: in the room above there is one of the most unhappy beings on the face of the earth. He is my nephew and Mabel's brother, and he stands accused of a terrible crime of which he is innocent. There is a price set on his capture. That villain Latour has tracked him to my rooms, and has now hurried off to Scotland Yard to fetch the detectives, who will be here in a few minutes. A policeman is stationed in the court at the foot of my staircase so as to make sure that no one leaves the house. All this has just been whispered to me by Latour's daughter—Heaven reward her for it!—who refuses all connivance in her father's wicked scheme. What I want you to do, Dimsdale, is to come to my rooms, and when the officers arrive they will find you there, but not my nephew. For the time being they may arrest you, believing you to be Julian, but a few minutes will suffice to prove your identity and set you free. Will you do me this great service?"

"I will," I replied, although I felt myself to be still almost as much in the dark as before.

He gripped my hand and his eyes were eloquent with thanks. "We have not a moment to lose," he said. "Lower your lamp and follow me."

I hurriedly did as he bade me and followed him upstairs to the second floor. The door of the room that for so many months had been to me a veritable chamber of mystery was now open. We went in, and at once Mr. Lydford shut the door, locked it, and took out the key. The room was lighted by one candle only. On the sofa reclined a young man, who rose as we went in. He was tall and thin; his face was handsome, with a look of his sister in it, but pale and worn. His large dark eyes shone with a brilliant feverish light, and his thin white hand trembled as it rested on the table.

"Julian, this is Mr. Dimsdale, the friend of whom I spoke to you," said Mr. Lydford. The young man bowed gravely, but did not answer. "You will remain here for a little while till the danger is past, but not a sound of any kind must betray your presence. Lie on the sofa and do not stir till I come again. Fear not, all will be well."

The young man sat down on the sofa without a word. Mr. Lydford took up the candle and beckoned me to follow him.

The recess next the fireplace was fitted up with a tall bookcase. He crossed to this and touched some secret spring. The bookcase fell back on noiseless hinges and before me stood revealed an opening through the wall into the next house. We passed through and I found myself in Mr. Lydford's familiar room. The door was pushed back to its place, the spring gave a soft click, a case of stuffed birds was wheeled into the recess, and the separation between the two houses was complete. The mystery of the second floor was a mystery no longer.

I started involuntarily as my eyes fell on the slender black-draped figure of Mabel Gilmour. She was standing at the door that opened on to the landing in the act of listening. She turned and extended to me a hand. A smile that had tears in it flitted like a gleam of April sunshine across her face. How careworn and heart-weary, but yet how beautiful, she looked!

"I felt sure that we might depend on you," she said, and her voice was charged with a pathos that touched me to the quick.

She went back to the door and resumed her listening attitude. "Do you hear anything?" Mr. Lydford asked of her.

"No, nothing."

Mr. Lydford turned to me. "You understand clearly what it is that I wish you to do?"

"I think so, sir. When the officers come to arrest your nephew they will find not him, but me."

"Precisely so. It was dark when Mabel and Julian arrived," he explained. "Latour was standing at the gateway and saw them enter the house. This is the coat Julian was wearing at the time: will you wear it for a little while in place of your own?"

"Certainly. A good thought." And in a trice I had put myself into Julian's dark grey frock coat in place of my own black one. We were both tall and both thin and the fit was by no means a bad one.

"One other point strikes me," I said. "Your nephew wears neither beard nor moustache; I wear both."

"I had forgotten that," groaned Mr. Lydford. Mabel clasped her hands in dismay.

"Five minutes will remedy the oversight," I said, "provided you have a sharp pair of scissors, a razor, and so on." I rather prided myself in those days on my brown silky beard and moustache, but for Mabel's sake what would I not have sacrificed?

Five minutes later I emerged from Mr. Lydford's bedroom as clean shaven as the palm of my hand. Mabel first stared at me and then smiled, I looked so strange and unfamiliar. Mr. Lydford nodded approval. "That is better—much better," he said. "Upon my word, you and Julian are not so very much unlike."

He drew a little card-table from under the window to the middle of the room. Then he gave me a cigar and bade me light it. "Take that chair with your back to the door," he said, as he sat down opposite and dealt out some cards. After that there was nothing to do but wait. No one spoke, we sat "with our hearts in our mouths," as the saying has it. Not a sound came from the room in the other house. I could not help asking myself what must be the thoughts and feelings of the poor young fellow who was sitting there in utter darkness and alone. What terrible crime was it that he had been adjudged guilty of?

A long time it seemed, although in reality it could only have been three or four minutes, before Mabel exclaimed in a half whisper: "They are coming! I hear the sound of footsteps."

She quitted the door, sat down near the fire, and bent over her embroidery. Mr. Lydford and I took up our cards.

Then came the sound of heavy footsteps ascending the stairs. Nearer and nearer they came, and a moment later there was a loud, imperative knocking at the door. At a sign from her uncle, Mabel crossed the room and opened the door. Mr. Lydford rose from his chair, his cards in one hand, his meerschaum in the other.

Two burly men, in plain clothes, pressed forward, Latour following close behind. "Who are you, sir, and what is the meaning of this intrusion?" demanded Mr. Lydford of the foremost man.

Before there was time to answer, Latour exclaimed, pointing to me: "There he is; that is the man you are looking for."

I had not risen, but had half turned on my chair, and was quietly puffing at my cigar. Two strides brought the leading officer to my side. "Julian Gilmour, you are my prisoner," he said, laying a hand on my shoulder. "You stand charged with the wilful murder of Frank Avory at Penley Regis on the 23rd of September, 18—, and I hold a warrant for your apprehension." The second officer had closed up while the first one was speaking. I caught the gleam of a pair of handcuffs. Latour, with a face as white as a sheet, stood just inside the doorway.

"Excuse me, but you are under some strange mistake," I said quietly to the officer, whose hand was still on my shoulder. "My name is not Gilmore but Dimsdale; Edward Dimsdale. I am a clerk in the London and Dublin Bank and lodge next door. If you doubt my word, ask this gentleman," pointing to Mr. Lydford; then pointing to Latour, I added, "or ask that man."

When I opened my lips, Latour gave a start; he was now staring at me as if he could not believe the evidence of his eyes. The

officer turned to him. "You hear this gentleman. Is he the person he says he is, or is he the man we are in search of?"

Latour came a few steps nearer and scanned my features closely. "There is some mistake—some strange mistake," he muttered. "This gentleman is certainly Mr. Dimsdale; only he has shaved off his beard and moustache since yesterday."

"We have nothing to do with the gentleman's beard and moustache," said the officer, a little contemptuously. "The point is, is he Julian Gilmour, or is he not?"

"This is not the man I have seen come here twice, and whom I now know to be Julian Gilmour, and that gentleman's nephew," pointing to Mr. Lydford. "Nor do I believe it to be the same man I saw come here this evening in company with that young lady. There is some trick here—some cheat; they throw the dust in your eyes—pouf!"

Hitherto Mr. Lydford had been still. He now addressed himself to the officers: "I hope you are convinced that this gentleman is my very good friend and neighbour, Mr. Dimsdale, and not the unhappy young man you are in search of. As there seems to be some suspicion of trickery, you had better search the premises: it will be more satisfactory both to yourselves and to me. My dear," turning to Mabel, "be good enough to light the hand lamp for these gentlemen. Now, Dimsdale, I think we may resume our play."

My cigar had gone out. I went to the lamp to re-light it, and saw Latour stealing out of the room. He turned at the doorway, and I caught a momentary glimpse of a white, snarling, wolfish face and two wicked eyes, that haunted my dreams afterwards.

The officers made a pretence of searching the rooms, feeling assured beforehand that their doing so would be without avail. Then the constable from below was called up, but he was most positive in his assertions that no one had entered or left the house while he had been on watch in the court. After this, there was nothing for our friends but to take their leave; they did so with a few awkward apologies, which Mr. Lydford accepted in his most dignified and ceremonious manner. When the last sound of their footsteps had died away he rose and grasped me warmly by the hand. "You have to-night done a service that none of us can ever hope to repay," he said. "I thank you from my heart."

"And I, too, Mr. Dimsdale," said Mabel, in low, tremulous tones. Then, somehow, I found that my other hand had hold of one of hers. But her face was hidden on her uncle's shoulder: the overcharged heart had found relief in tears.

For upwards of a week Julian Gilmour lay in hiding in Beryl Mansions. There was every reason to believe that the premises were watched both by day and night. At length, one evening after dark, he stole out, having disguised himself so as to look as much like Mr. Lydford as possible. He wore a white wig and white

whiskers, gold rimmed eye-glasses, and a suit of his uncle's somewhat old-fashioned clothes, and he got clear away. He and Mabel—he would not go without her—crossed from Southampton to Jersey; thence they made their way to St. Malo, and then to Bremen, at which port they shipped, under fictitious names, for New York direct. Julian had a cousin settled in Chicago, who was willing to find him a home.

The story Mr. Lydford had to tell me must be given now.

Julian Gilmour and Frank Avory had been drawn together as schoolfellows, and afterwards as young men. In the course of an autumnal walking tour which they were taking together through some of the lovely scenery of the western counties, they found themselves on a certain evening at the little town of Penley Regis. There happened to be a fair on at the time, a number of noisy people were in the hotel, and the two young men engaged a private sitting-room. Here they dined, and this being the last night of their holiday, they celebrated the occasion, as young men sometimes will, by drinking more wine than was good for them. Later on, they were seen leaning out of the window and smoking their cigars. But when the house was quiet, and the landlord and his wife were on the point of retiring for the night, they were surprised to hear the sound of high words proceeding from them. Although they could not distinguish clearly what was said, it was quite evident that the two young gentlemen were in the midst of a violent quarrel. Presently, however, two doors were heard to bang violently, and after that all was still.

Next morning, as neither of the young men put in an appearance, the landlord himself went to call them, when he was horrified to find that one of them had been murdered in the night and that the other was nowhere to be found.

The two bed-rooms were next each other, and the doors of both opened out of the sitting-room. There were traces of a struggle in Frank Avory's room, while the poor fellow himself lay dead on his bed, stabbed to the heart. Such jewellery as he wore was of a valuable description, but neither that nor his purse had been taken. In Julian Gilmour's room the window was found wide open, and, although his knapsack was left behind, it was evident that the fugitive had taken some portion of its contents with him in his flight. There being no particle of evidence to connect anyone else with the crime, a verdict of Wilful Murder was returned against Julian Gilmour, and a reward was offered for his capture.

Time passed on, and the tragedy at Penley Regis was three months old, when Adrian Gilmour, married and living in an old manor house in a quiet part of the country, was startled on his way home in the dusk of a winter afternoon by a shabby figure, who stepped suddenly from behind a tree and confronted him. It was his brother Julian. He had been hiding in a wretched garret in the east-end of London. There he had stayed till his money was all but exhausted and his life

of solitary misery endurable no longer. He had now come to crave shelter and concealment from his brother.

Questioned with regard to the events of the night at Penley, he admitted at once that he and Avory had quarrelled—"the first time in our lives that there was a wrong word between us." As to the cause of the quarrel he was somewhat reticent, but let it be understood that it concerned a young lady. Feeling too angry to stay and meet his friend at breakfast next morning, he resolved to leave there and then, walk to the nearest railway station, and send for his knapsack later. Ere many days elapsed, he read the account of the murder, found, to his horror, that the crime was laid at his door, and concealed himself.

Julian found shelter in his brother's house. From his youth upward his relatives had looked upon him as one who would never be particularly robust, either mentally or physically. It was considered a good thing that he had a small fortune of his own, and that no particular necessity existed for him to fight his way in the world. He had lacked the courage to go back and face the charge. The evidence against him seemed so overwhelmingly strong, that he felt sure he should never be able to prove his innocence.

But he could not remain at his brother's house for ever without the risk of discovery. So another temporary home was found for him in the house of Mr. Bevan, a kinsman of the family. Already his uncle, Mr. Lydford, had prepared for him the hiding-place, the secret of which the reader now knows, as a refuge in case of need. It was quite by accident that Mr. Lydford had discovered that there had formerly been a door of communication between his rooms and the next house, although it was now papered over and had evidently not been used for a number of years; and he utilised his discovery. The hidden spring, the bookcase that filled the recess on one side, and the case of stuffed birds that occupied it on the other, were the work of a man on whose silence and discretion they could thoroughly rely. A duplicate of the key, in the possession of Daniel Ivy, had not been difficult to obtain. In this room young Gilmour had found refuge on several occasions for one or two nights when passing through London on his way from one place of hiding in the country to another.

But now at last, to the infinite relief of all concerned, he had succeeded in placing the ocean between himself and those in search of him. His sister accompanied him all the way to Chicago, stayed with him a fortnight, and then returned. When I saw her again she seemed a different being. The melancholy that had made its home in her beautiful eyes dwelt there no longer, but only a faint ghost of it seen for a moment now and again, to remind one of what had been. The sunshine of her smile had lost its sadness; the clouds had parted and gone; the skies were blue once more; the May-time of love was at hand.

Before this, M. Latour had given up the keys of his rooms into Daniel Ivy's hands, and Beryl Mansions saw him no more. His profession was that of a spy: there was no lack of such men in those days, when London swarmed with refugees and the Orsini conspiracy was in process of incubation. Mr. Lydford always regretted that no opportunity offered itself for expressing his gratitude to Mademoiselle Latour. She was worthy of a better father.

Next Mr. Bevan paid a visit to Daniel Ivy. His nephew, he said, had changed his mind and was not coming to England at all, consequently he had no further need for the rooms. With that, he made Daniel a handsome present, and took his leave.

Close upon that, another tenant left Beryl Mansions: Mr. Lydford. Before he went the secret door was fastened up and papered over, as before, and to this day Daniel has no suspicion of its existence.

About two years later a man, who had been condemned to penal servitude for burglary, died in prison. On his death-bed he confessed that it was he who had murdered Frank Avory. While loitering about the inn on the evening of the fair he had seen Avory open his purse, and had also seen that it contained a considerable sum in gold. There and then he had made up his mind that he would make it his. Later on, when all was quiet and while he was watching the house from behind a hedge, he was surprised to see a window thrown open, and next moment a young man drop from it to the ground, and walk away. Here was an opportunity of entering the house made ready to his hand, and he did not fail to avail himself of it. He knew which was Avory's bed-room, and at once made his way to it. But his entrance disturbed the sleeper, who sprang from his bed. Then ensued a struggle, the sad result of which we know. Frightened at what he had done, and fancying that he heard footsteps, the murderer hurried away without waiting to secure the booty for which he had sacrificed so much.

What a happy day was that which brought Julian Gilmour back to his native land, his innocence proved to the world!

It was on that day I first told Mabel that ——

But the reader, who has kindly followed me thus far, may safely be left to imagine what it was that I had to tell.

"SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER."

By Mary Grace Wightwick, Author of "Mrs. Carr's Companion."

THE westering sun was sinking over the hills, deepening the tint of the purple heather, re-gilding the golden gorse. Its level beams made rosy the white, far-distant cliffs, and intensified the tone of a sea almost too blue to lave an English shore.

Bernard Clive's brush moved rapidly as he transferred to his sketching block a group of gigantic rocks and a stretch of moorland scenery, glorified for the nonce by the glamour of the sunset. He was not best pleased when an interruption came in the shape of galloping horses' hoofs, and a rider appeared on the crest of the moor, riding rapidly in his direction along a narrow bridle road, ending, as he perceived to his horror, a few hundred yards farther on, in a steep, broken descent to the sea a thousand feet below.

And now the runaway animal was near enough for him to see by the floating skirt that the rider was a lady, powerless to check her horse, or even turn its course. In a moment the dreamy artist was transformed into the man of action. Half a dozen bounds through the few yards of gorse and heather which divided him from the bridle path below, and he stood ready to oppose his youthful strength to the horse's mad career.

There was a doubtful moment of suspense as rider and steed reached the crown of the hill and began to descend the terrible slope towards destruction—*facilis descensus Avernus!*—then came an encounter, a brief struggle, and Clive had gained the victory. The horse stood panting beside him, and he received the terrified lady in his arms as she sank into a swoon. Her hat had fallen off; a tangle of rippling golden brown hair half concealed the pale deathly face which rested on his shoulder. This result was more embarrassing than the rescue to the young artist, who knew little of womankind and their ways. What should he do here in this moorland wilderness with this helpless burden lying prone upon his arm? He looked around. To right and left only rocks and heather and the sea rippling far below; but on the far horizon, inland, a dark speck, which soon developed into a galloping groom, who arrived pale with agitation expecting nothing less than the worst.

The sight of Clive's face re-assured him a little.

"It's all right. She was not thrown—I was just in time, thank heaven!"

The man shuddered as he looked towards the awful brink not far off.

"Yes; it was a fearful risk," said Clive, answering his unspoken

thought, "but never mind that now. We must think what can be done. How near can you get help?"

"No nigher than Combehurst, sir. I could ride back and tell them to send a carriage if you can stay with my mistress."

"Then ride your hardest, and explain where we are to be found. Who is your mistress?"

"Lady Crewe, of Combehurst, sir."

"Well send her maid in the carriage—and tie up that horse securely before you go."

Bernard Clive had no pity to spare for the white-faced groom, who seemed half mazed with terror and excitement. His thoughts were absorbed by his helpless charge as he laid her tenderly down on a bed of heather beneath a sheltering rock, supporting her head upon his knee as he gently fanned her with his hat. It seemed an age before a faint colour fluttered back to the pallid cheek, and the breath began to return in painful, gasping sighs. Bernard had never seen a woman faint before, and his face looked sufficiently concerned as he bent over her, wondering how best to give the sufferer relief.

That she was young and beautiful naturally increased his compassion.

He felt infinitely relieved when just as a pair of the loveliest possible grey-blue eyes unclosed and met his wistful ones with a dreamy look of surprise, followed by a charming tinge of colour, the roll of carriage wheels sounded on the rocky road, and a brougham hove in sight drawn by two spirited thoroughbreds with Lady Crewe's groom in attendance as outrider. A neat-looking maid stepped from the carriage and hastened towards her prostrate mistress with loud demonstrations of distress.

"Hush!" cried Bernard, sternly. "She is already coming round. Don't alarm her. Tell them to turn the carriage and I will take her to it at once. You are better, Madam, are you not?"

"Yes, yes; I can walk."

"You are able to? Take my arm then. There! that is right," as she slowly tottered to the carriage supported between himself and her maid.

He waited bareheaded to watch the brougham drive jolting away over the rough ground, and then went to collect his scattered painting materials. Suddenly the carriage stopped and a footman came hastening back. My lady wished to know the gentleman's name and address.

The artist handed the man a card upon which he had scribbled the name of the little inn in Combehurst village where he was staying, then slung his knapsack over his shoulder and went on his way.

The sun had sunk below the hills. Sea and sky were surging into a grey uniformity of colour. The twilight gloom was deepening over the moor, and gorse and heather rustled sadly in the evening breeze, the *Ichabod* of their departed glory. So at least it seemed to Clive,

and when he returned to his temporary quarters at the village inn, there was nothing about the dingy little parlour to raise his spirits.

Combehurst was a favourite haunt with artists, and many painters before him had been pained with the crudities of this parlour's gaudy colouring: with the verdant carpet, and brickdust table-cloth, with the cumbrous gilt-framed mirror draped in pink like a village maiden at a fair, with the libellous caricatures of Nelson and Wellington which graced the walls. Clive spent as little time there as possible. Like most lovers of nature, he preferred to hear the lark sing in the yellow cornfields, rather than the mouse squeak behind the wainscot. So he escaped to the brown moors and fern-fringed lanes, to the company of the brawling streams and whispering woods, where morning mists, and evening sunsets, and noontide glory found him busy with his brush. But this evening some disturbing element had come between him and his work. Do what he would, his capricious pencil could trace no other outlines than those of the lovely face which had rested so pale and placid on his knee a short time since. He went for a stroll in the dusk to try and forget his adventure. There was not much chance of it. Every stone about the little rural village seemed echoing the name of Lady Crewe. The schools?—Lady Crewe had built them. The church?—Restored by Lady Crewe. The peasant mothers, the village children had her name and the story of her goodness always on their lips. Clive could see that he himself rose in the estimation of his worthy landlord when later in the evening a little note was brought to him from the great Lady of the village. "Would Mr. Clive be so good as to call upon Lady Crewe at 4 o'clock the following afternoon?"

He obeyed the summons; and punctually at the hour named stood beneath the massive portico of Combehurst. The man-servant who answered the door led Clive through a lofty hall of Pompeian style and colouring, along tile-paved passages to my Lady's own boudoir; a charming little sanctum, where peacock-hued hangings gleaming with golden threads made a fitting background to one of the loveliest pictures that Clive in his artist-life and artist-dreams had ever looked upon. If Lady Crewe had seemed to him passing fair in the dark riding-habit of yesterday, what must he think of her to-day in these creamy-lace-softened draperies, with the outline of her shapely head, and golden hair dressed in a fashion all her own, defined against a harmonious background of soft, yet brilliant tone?

She half rose as he entered, and held out her hand with gracious alacrity.

"You will excuse this informal reception, Mr. Clive; I am in no mood for visitors to-day, and am not at home to the world at large. This is my cousin, Miss Warner, who kindly keeps me company in my loneliness. Alicia! let me introduce Mr. Clive, my brave preserver of yesterday. Help me to thank him for his prompt heroism."

The elderly duenna whose large sausage curls proclaimed the era

of her long-past youth, jumped up—displacing as she did so a large white cat which lay purring on her lap—and heartily shook hands with the visitor, seizing this opportunity of shedding a few tears from a reservoir very near the surface with Miss Warner, and always apt to brim over. Her murmurs of gratitude were almost choked in sobs.

"Come, Alicia, enough of that. Mr. Clive! I am afraid the life you have saved is of little value to anyone but the owner," with a bitter-sweet smile which saddened the young man; "nevertheless I owe you my grateful thanks for rescuing me from the horrible death I thought was inevitable."

She paled and shuddered. The tearful Alicia sobbed and sniffed again.

"I want to know how best to show my gratitude. You are an artist by profession I hear. Can I—are you—have you any schemes which I can forward?" This, with a glow of embarrassment, for it was a difficult rôle—that of playing Lady Bountiful to this handsome young fellow with his air of haughty independence.

"Your kind acknowledgment of my slight service is sufficient reward," he said, promptly. "I trust you have recovered from the effects of your alarm?"

"I have not recovered," she said, petulantly. "I shall never feel really myself again while I am crushed under such a load of obligation. Won't you let me help you? Genius is seldom prosperous: I am rich—too rich for my wants. Will you accept nothing from me?"

The sweet wistful smile stirred Bernard Clive's heart strangely. The stern lines about his mouth relaxed a little.

"I will gladly accept your gratitude, Lady Crewe, and any morsel of interest you can spare to a struggling artist."

"But you won't let me further your ambitions! For of course you *have* ambitions?"

A light kindled in his eyes and his cheek glowed.

"Have I not? Some day I hope to go and study in Rome; to see the masterpieces of ancient art, and the struggles of modern times. But so far I barely earn enough by portrait-painting and the sale of my sketches to make my mother a comfortable home. It is uphill work."

"You paint portraits! Will you undertake a picture of me? I must leave one behind me, if only as a legacy for poor Alicia."

The artist flushed again. "If I could be sure this was no fictitious want conjured up for my benefit," he stammered ——

"How 'difficult' you are! My cousin will tell you that I intended to set someone to work upon me next time I went to town. Isn't it so, Alicia?"

"Then I shall only be too happy to undertake the commission."

Preliminaries were quickly settled, the sitter making only one stipulation, that she must be painted in character.

"I won't inflict so many feet of mere painted canvas upon posterity. The picture shall have some interest besides a personal one. Suggest a character for me, Mr. Clive."

Clive, growing enthusiastic at the prospect of such a subject for his pencil, now that his scruples were set at rest, proposed that his patroness should sit to him as Lady Castlewood in that scene of Thackeray's novel where after their brief dispute she turns to bid Esmond good-night.

The suggestion pleased Lady Crewe, who forthwith despatched an order to town for a suitable dress to be fashioned after the artist's own design.

When the day appointed for the first sitting arrived, the servant, who evidently had his instructions, led Clive not to the boudoir of luxurious loungers, but to a room with a northern light looking upon the gardens, fitted up as a temporary studio, where his easel and canvas awaited him. The room was empty. The only things with life in them were two of Miss Warner's white cats curled up on a velvet footstool, and some tall, crimson lilies in a quaint china bowl, which somehow reminded the artist of their stately owner.

Suddenly a portière of dull-toned tapestry was drawn aside and "Lady Castlewood" entered. Whatever Bernard had expected, the reality far surpassed his anticipations.

"Shall I do?" she cried, playfully, with a faint blush as she surprised the sudden involuntary admiration in his eyes. "Am I old-world enough to please you? Alicia says I am splendid! She is a severe critic, so be sure you do *Lady Castlewood* justice."

He rallied his mazed senses and set to work, then, and many days after. The dingy inn-parlour looked dingier than ever when he returned to it after those pleasant sittings. His own company failed to satisfy him after the hours of easy-flowing talk, while Miss Warner ambled in and out with her knitting, fondled her cats, and time glided on like a dream. The artist's reserve began to wear off in an atmosphere where there was nothing to wound the proud sensitiveness of one who had been hitherto at outs with fortune.

Enticed by his sitter's gentle questioning he would speak freely of his work; of the failures and successes of the past; of his hopes for the future. He was ambitious, that was evident, ready to deny himself for his art. Long ere this he would have taken to himself the pilgrim-staff and scallop shell, and found his way—on foot if need be—to the Italy he thought of by day and dreamed of by night, but for one tie which tethered him to his own country, an invalid mother, the centre of his cares and interests. He told of her gentle, unselfish life, of the sacrifices she had made that he might follow the profession he loved; of her frail health, and of his hope that his labours at Combehurst would procure her the holiday in fresh country air she so sorely needed away from her home amid a wilderness of bricks and mortar.

Lady Crewe had a good heart. She took a kindly interest in all he told her, asked the whereabouts of his home, and said she must visit his studio and make his mother's acquaintance next time she went to town. Then she grew thoughtful and talked no more, but next day she gave Clive a little note to enclose to his mother. It contained a kind invitation to the old lady to come at once and spend a fortnight at Combehurst, where its mistress promised her every care and attention and the best of bracing air. "Yes, and my good cousin's society into the bargain! Alicia loves to have somebody to look after and pet, Mr. Clive! She has no one but me and her cats. I don't give her half trouble enough, and as for the cats—the big white one pinched its tail in the door at breakfast-time, and she has been crying all the morning about it!"

In truth Miss Warner entered at this moment with dejected countenance and tearful eyes, but quite ready to second her darling's invitation. Bernard's scruples were swept away at last in the tide of both ladies' generous hospitality, and he forwarded the invitation. It was gratefully accepted: and a few days saw Mrs. Clive established in two cosy rooms en suite on the ground-floor, looking upon an old-fashioned flower garden where she could stroll unmolested whenever the fancy took her.

Alicia Warner struck up a great friendship with the gentle silver-haired old lady. They caressed the cats, discussed Bernard's perfections, exchanged knitting patterns, and played exciting games of whist with double dummy, while the elder lady's eyes grew bright and almost youthful again, and the delicate pink of improving health returned to her faded cheek. Bernard in his homely inn could work at ease knowing his mother so well cared for.

One day about this time Miss Warner told Clive her cousin's history. Not an uncommon one.

She had been a Miss Mohun. Her father's affairs had become embarrassed and his heavily mortgaged family estates were about to pass into the hands of strangers, when the mortgagee, Sir Edward Crewe, a newly-knighted Manchester manufacturer, offered to forego his claim upon condition of receiving the hand in marriage of General Mohun's beautiful daughter, then just eighteen. Gisela Mohun was devoted to her father: he was in failing health; she consented to make the sacrifice. The fruits of it lasted until her father died, a fortnight after her marriage; the sacrifice itself for five long years, during which Gisela Crewe made a daily offering of youth, and health, and hope at the shrine of her invalid husband. (There were tears even now in Alicia's faithful old eyes as she told the story.) He had been stricken with paralysis a few months after their union. Henceforth the wife's rôle was that of nurse to a selfish, cross-grained tyrant. Although she had been a widow now three years, the impress of that long martyrdom was visible still in the sweet chastened eyes, and in the firm mouth telling of patient self-control

of the woman of six-and-twenty. "She never complained to anyone, never reproached her father's memory. She is an angel, nothing less!" broke out Miss Warner, dropping tears as usual on the white furry coat of the favourite asleep on her lap. But this time Clive forgave her emotion.

Lady Crewe had been called away that afternoon to receive an unexpected guest and the sitting had been cut short; but the artist remained working up some details of costume until she returned later in evening dress to hasten Alicia, fastening some crimson roses at her throat the while. She dropped one in crossing the room. He thought she did not see how he picked it up, and covertly pressed it to his lips before restoring it. He would have kept it had he dared. His admiration had deepened into reverence now.

His patroness kept him long waiting next day. When she appeared, apologising with her usual grace for her delay, there was a nervous agitation in her manner, and the evidence of a sleepless night in her languid eyes.

"I am so much of a hermit that the company of my fellow-creatures actually jars upon me," she said. "My accident must have upset my nerves. I don't know what has come to me lately! Mr. Clive, shall you care to paint such a haggard, weary creature as I look this morning?" There was a suspicion of tears upon her lashes as she turned from the mirror impatiently.

"You are tired, dearest," said her cousin, always ready to pet her beloved charge. "Give up the sitting this morning."

"No, no!" she cried, petulantly, "it rests me to stay here in this quiet studio away from my worries. I feel unnerved, unstrung. Alicia, I must travel this winter. We will go to Rome. Mr. Clive, will you come and see us there?"

He flushed, and then grew suddenly grave. "Do not tempt me away from work and duty, Lady Crewe. I shall have to expiate this long holiday by a busy winter."

"What hard measure you deal to yourself! Your stoicism is quite a reproach to us poor useless Sybarites. How long must you postpone your pleasure, pray?"

"Pleasure is very present with me now," he answered, softly, but not lifting his eyes from his work. "If only it were not so fleeting?"

Bernard Clive would not have wondered at his benefactress's dejection had he been invisibly present at a little scene the evening before, while Lady Crewe's newly-arrived visitor, her sister-in-law, Mrs. Mohun, inspected and approved the nearly completed portrait. When it had been sufficiently admired: and indeed the severest critic must have found it worthy of admiration: the guest suddenly turned upon her hostess. "So much for the portrait, Gisela; but what about the painter?"

Lady Crewe flushed at the sudden question demanded so arbitrarily by eyes as well as voice.

"His name is Clive," she said, hastily. "Bernard Clive."

"Psha! what matters his name to me! Gisela, I may as well tell you at once that this portrait is the cause of my sudden visit. The story of your romantic introduction to the artist has reached our ears, coupled with a rumour that you have refused your neighbour, Lord Nettlecombe, after a twelvemonth's wooing. What does it mean?"

"It means that I would not marry Lord Nettlecombe if he were to woo me a hundred years, instead of one!" she answered, vehemently. "Do you think so meanly of me, Lucy, as to believe that I should sell myself a second time? I did it once, and Sir Edward knew it; knew that I was but a chattel bought with his money to grace the head of his table, and entertain his friends. But again? Never! I know now what life has to offer! what splendid possibilities lie within the grasp of youth!"

Her eyes softened and shone as she clasped her hands passionately together.

"Nevertheless you might do worse than marry Lord Nettlecombe," her sister-in-law said, coldly. "As his wife you would have the entrée of the best houses, and wipe out the memory of your former mésalliance. A degradation like that was all very well once, for money; but for love!—Pah! Alicia tells me this obscure painter is handsome and well-bred, as well as talented. You are *sure* no tendresse for him stands in Lord Nettlecombe's way?——No; don't turn away from me, or I shall believe I have guessed rightly!"

The victim, brought to bay, raised her head and boldly faced her questioner. "And if your suspicion were correct, Lucy, what then?"

Mrs. Mohun dropped her sister-in-law's hands as though they had been stinging-nettles.

"What then! You, Gisela! a Mohun! can ask me *what then?* Simply that you would drop out of our lives as though you had never existed! We have tolerated Crewes, vulgar Crewes, over-dressed Crewes. Crewes with no single aspiration in the shape of an H. (Your first descent in the social scale had its raison d'être). But the wife of a struggling artist, a Clive! a nobody! Come, Gisela, go to bed and think better of Lord Nettlecombe's offer like a sensible woman. You and Alicia Warner live here in your seclusion until you become quite romantic and tête montée."

Mrs. Mohun drove away next morning before Clive's arrival in the studio, trusting her words had made some impression upon her young kinswoman. Combehurst was a pleasant house to visit. Any imbroglio which involved its mistress's social ostracism would be distinctly inconvenient.

As for Lady Crewe, she breathed more freely after her guest's departure, and the recollection of her worldly-wise counsels vanished with her bodily presence.

Meantime the portrait approached completion. The artist lingered

over his work as though he loved it, but excuse for prolonging his task further was failing him. There came a day when he promised himself to put the last finishing touches on the morrow.

The young mistress of Combehurst retired early that evening, glad to shut her door for once even upon the indulgent petting of her kind old cousin. Once in solitude she began pacing the room with head bent, and hands clasped, as was her wont in perplexed and painful meditation, which yet had its sweetness.

"He loves me: I know it, I feel it," she murmured to herself with quick-coming blushes. "Every look, every tone, all that he says, and still more all he does *not* say tells me so unmistakeably. Yet he will break both his heart and mine rather than bend his pride to speak! Genius levels all things. Why should he hesitate? Oh! for some spell to unseal those proud lips!"

She threw open her window and looked out upon the clear September night. The lights of heaven were glowing and palpitating in their azure dome. A queenly young moon had climbed to its zenith encircled by its starry train, illuminating the quiet reaches of the park, and the wide-spreading gardens. She impatiently shut the window again and drew the curtain upon the far-reaching acres, the proud possessions which made an impassable gulf between her and her lover.

"If it were but the other way!" she cried. "If I were only the beggar-maid and he my King Cophetua! As it is, there is only one thing can save us both from life-long misery. Can I ever bring myself to such humiliation?"

The clear night was succeeded by one of the tranquil, hazy mornings so common in early autumn, when the languid sun seems reluctant to pierce the lingering earth-mists. All the brilliance in the studio seemed centred on the easel where rested the beautiful picture of *Lady Castlewood*, finished at last. The artist's mother and Miss Warner were before it in admiring contemplation, and in the background stood the artist himself, furtively comparing his completed work with the fair original beside him.

Lady Castlewood and her kinsman have made up their quarrel and she turns, taper in hand, to bid Esmond good-night. The light of it falls upon her sweet, fair face and ruffled golden hair, on the quaint pointed bodice and delicate lace, and plays on the folds of the gorgeous skirt, stiff with richness and dignity.

"I am so sorry the sittings are over; they have been very pleasant. Even Snowball has quite enjoyed them," says Miss Warner, plaintively. "I must get you to paint Pussy's picture, Mr. Clive, as you are so successful," stroking, as she speaks, the biggest and heaviest of her pets, which she carries in her arms.

"I shall be most happy if ever opportunity offers, Miss Warner; but I must postpone the pleasure, as I intend leaving Combehurst this afternoon."

"So soon!" Even for her pride's sake Lady Crewe could not

repress her start of surprise and dismay. "Have you exhausted its beauties already, Mr. Clive?" She tried to still the trembling of her pale lips and to put the question carelessly.

"That would be impossible," he said, gravely, "but I have lingered here long enough. Too long perhaps," he muttered in an undertone.

Lady Crewe turned to Mrs. Clive. "Can't you persuade your son to remain a little longer? at least to escort you home?" she asked in her pretty pleading way.

"My mother agrees with me, that it is time for me to be gone," he answered for her in his deep, decided tones.

He looked at his mother as he spoke and the two exchanged a glance full of significance, which their hostess intercepted. The mother's was wistful but full of loving encouragement; the son's had a stern renunciation in it which said: "Have confidence in me—I can endure!"

"Well, at least we must not lose *you* yet, Mrs. Clive," said Miss Warner, filling up the pause with some of the commonplace padding which is the inevitable attendant of every tragedy. "And now you *are* here do come to my room and let me show you the cosy new nest I have planned for Snowball—dear intelligent creature! Only this morning, she ——"

The portière fell behind the pair as they retreated along the passage and withheld the particulars of Snowball's last exploit from the two left behind, upon whom an embarrassing silence fell.

At last Lady Crewe crossed the room, unlocked the drawer of an old bureau and took from it a purse, a little embroidered trifle of plush and gold which she handed to the artist.

"A small acknowledgment of all the trouble you have taken," she said, smiling nervously. "I only hope this chef d'œuvre may be the herald of future success in your beloved art."

"I trust so, but—Lady Crewe, you must please take back your gift, and with it my thanks for your many kindnesses. I can accept no money for my work."

He spoke with cold self-repression, and avoided looking at her, as he thrust the purse back upon her reluctant hand.

"Mr. Clive! What does this mean?"

"Only," he said, hastily, "that circumstances have changed. I cannot make this particular picture a matter of traffic. I have had the pleasure of painting it—that is enough."

"Ah! you would prefer your reward in some other form! I understand."

"You mistake me, Lady Crewe," he answered. "I want no payment. The only guerdon I would accept for my labour of love is——"

"Yes? Why do you hesitate? You have fairly earned any reward it is in my power to give."

Her breath came thick and fast as she leaned against the window casement facing him, absently pulling to pieces the creeper-sprays

which strayed over the sill. "You will think me very presumptuous," he said slowly with lips as pale as her own, "when I tell you that the only thing which would content me is—" he hesitated—"the picture itself."

"Come! the demand is not so extravagant after all! To exhibit, I suppose you mean? To bring you fame and fortune on the walls of Burlington House next season."

She spoke lightly, her playful tones in strange contrast to his vehement answer.

"To exhibit!—exhibit the picture for the world to stare at, and criticise and wonder over! Heaven forbid the profanation! I ask it for *myself*, my very own! There are associations which make it of more value to me than—than—Have I asked too much, Lady Crewe?" he added, stepping nearer in his eagerness, with a wistful petition in his dark eloquent eyes.

Her cheek blanched, her fingers began to fidget nervously with the bracelet on her arm. How hard it was to speak!

"It pains me to refuse you," she said, slowly, stealing a glance at his pale, eager, earnest face, "but I, too, have associations with that picture. I cannot give it up."

He bowed quickly, proudly, and turned to collect his brushes. He had been a fool to expect any other answer.

She stood before him pale and trembling in her gorgeous dress, with downcast eyes she dared not raise to his. Must she indeed stoop to conquer?

"I cannot spare the *portrait*," she says, with averted face; "but—but" in faltering tones with sudden overwhelming blushes, "if you had asked for the *original*——"

In these days connoisseurs prophesy great things of the successful artist, Bernard Clive, and critics are busy with his name. But he maintains that he shall never paint anything better than the portrait of his lovely wife which hangs in his library at Combehurst. *That* he says came from his heart. She appears in many other of his pictures. She stands sweet and composed in her white draperies as Hermione, the injured Queen; she weeps over Geraint, an Enid in faded silk; as Egeria she counsels Numa from her Sacred Grove. That inspiration Clive owed to their first happy winter in Rome.

There is a later picture where she sits as the Shunamite woman with her child upon her knee, and the realisation of a long-deferred hope shining in her lustrous eyes;—another where she kneels as the Viking Haestan's wife with her little ones around her, and her fair hair falling over her shoulders; but still her husband says no sweeter presentment of Gisela Clive will ever be given to the world than the picture of *Lady Castlewood* which won him his wife!

IN A HAUNTED HOUSE.

SPRING was coming in early. In our close London home Hilda, Gervase, and I longed for a change to the country. We studied long lists of advertisements daily in vain; they were all too dear; till one morning my brother looked up from his paper at the breakfast-table, and exclaimed: "Here it is, girls! An earthly paradise. And for three months, rent free!"

He read out the description. "The Glass House, in Midlandshire, the property of a gentleman resident on the Continent." The house would be let, or rather, the left wing of the house would be let, rent free, for three months, to any respectable tenant who would undertake to care for the shut-up rooms, reserved by the family.

"Rent free!" said Hilda, who, though an artist by profession, like our brother Gervase, is a practical little body. "There must be something very wrong about the place."

"Shall we go to it and find out what it is, and earn the lifelong gratitude of the gentleman on the Continent by putting it to rights?" asked Gervase.

Yes, Hilda and I were wild to go. And we gave Gervase no peace until he set out for the office of the solicitor, whose address appeared in the advertisement.

"He came back in time for luncheon. "It is a case of ghosts," he declared, solemnly.

"Ghosts! What nonsense," exclaimed Hilda.

"I am sure of it, by the way in which that lawyer stammered and hesitated over the business. The house belongs to Sir Rufus Saxon and bears a queer name: is said, in short, to be haunted. When the lawyer heard there were ladies in the case, his long face grew longer still. He thought we ought to have a man-servant with us, as it is a very lonely place. Where are we to find one?"

"I can do that," said I. "We will take Mr. and Mrs. Mark." And my brother and sister laughed at the names.

That evening I paid a visit to a small house in a smaller terrace, in the vicinity of the King's Road, Chelsea. There lodged in it a working builder's foreman and his second wife, who had been cook in a gentleman's family. The man, improvident, like too many of his class, had made no provision for the "rainy day," which had lately come upon him in the shape of a severe injury to his right hand. The woman, who had bestowed herself and her savings upon him in an hour of infatuation, was infatuated still, and was secretly jealous of him, of his daughter, and of all the relatives of his deceased wife. Possibly her jealousy was not always unfounded, for he was good-looking, and made much of by the damsels of their acquaintance.

They gladly accepted the temporary situation I had come to offer. Mrs. Mark detained me in the passage when I was leaving.

"I'm sure, Miss A., I shall be for ever grateful to you for thinking of us," she said, with an apprehensive glance at the parlour door. "Words can't express how I'm worrited between his being out of work and them hussies that are always running after a handsome man like him. Not to speak of his sisters and his young married daughter who are always dropping in promiscus just to pick holes in the way I manage. We will be at the station to meet you any day you name, miss, and glad and thankful shall I be to go."

Poor Eliza Mark! It really seemed cruel to smile over her troubles, as I made my way home. Her husband, who was about forty, slightly younger than she was, and gay in manner, might try her. But she had a warm, true heart, and all the elements of tragedy as well as of comedy were sheltered in that humble home at Chelsea.

Some days later, our party of five alighted at Dulworth station beneath a cold grey sky. The station was an uncovered platform, with a box at one end where lamps and stray luggage were kept, in company with a melancholy porter: who opened his eyes to stare at us, when we inquired how we were to reach "The Glass House."

The station-master emerged from a small room at the other end of the platform. He, too, seemed struck dumb by the question.

"You should have booked for Dulford instead of Dulworth," he said, at last. "The Glass House is three miles from here by road, less than two by the field path. But, if you'll excuse me, sir," he added, turning to Gervase, "I wouldn't take ladies there with the night coming on; I wouldn't, indeed. It is not a fit place for Christians to go to; that's the truth about the house."

"We have come down to live in it, and make it fit for Christians," replied Gervase, suppressing a laugh. "If you can get a cart for the servants and the luggage, we will walk the field way."

The station-master possessed a cart and a pony: but there was nobody to drive it, he said, except his brother. And his brother was afflicted—in fact, was deaf and dumb.

"The very thing," said Gervase aside to us. "He cannot frighter John Mark and his wife by telling tales on the way."

We waited to see them off, and then started ourselves. In the short lane, after emerging from the last field, we met the cart returning. The deaf and dumb driver pointed back to the tall iron gates of the park, and shook his head frowningly. Turning back to look, we saw him standing up in the cart to watch us as we entered.

Gervase locked the gates behind us and pocketed the key. Then he stretched up his long arm—he was unusually tall and thin—and unhung the huge clanging bell, setting it down under the high hedge where it would not be seen. "We have a hamper of provisions with us, girls," he said; "for a day or two we will shut out the world and its gossips, and find out the bearings of the place for ourselves. Eh, Kate?"

"Yes," I answered, approvingly. "It would not do to let Mrs. Mark be frightened at the onset; she might be more scared than she is at her husband's admirers."

We passed up a long and wide avenue, shaded by a double row of splendid elms. At its end the road swept round a spacious lawn to a terrace with marble vases and marble steps. The vases, the steps, and the second flight leading to the double-leaved hall door were thickly overgrown with moss. Beyond the lawn on the right a dark lake extended into a wood that was darker still.

The house looked like a monastery, with its thick grey stone walls and its arched doors and windows. Most of the rooms were closed with shutters. A gleam of light, through the lower casements of the left wing, was the one only element of cheerfulness in the scene.

As we stood on the terrace, with the grey dusk shutting down around us, and about to turn to the house, the gate bell (which Gervase had silenced) rang out loudly. We looked at each other. An eerie feeling crept over me. I gazed at the black lake and forest, and began to wish that Sir Rufus Saxon had never advertised for tenants for The Glass House.

John Mark and his wife came together to the door, in answer to its small bell, which we rang. They looked puzzled at seeing us so soon after the loud summons, knowing that the great bell hung at the park gate. Gervase detained Mrs. Mark to show her the key in his hand.

"I have locked the gate, you see. The country lasses down here are very handsome: I don't think we want them in here."

"Oh, sir! No, indeed!" said she.

"Then let them ring till they are tired."

The bell had not rung again; only that one mysterious peal: and we heard no more of it. Mrs. Mark soon sent in an excellent supper, and our rooms were thoroughly well warmed by the good fires her husband made. At ten o'clock we retired; and our first night in a haunted house was a night of serene and undisturbed repose.

The following day was again grey and gloomy, but we managed to get out between its showers and look about us. It was a beautiful place, in spite of the dulness and silence that overshadowed it. Towards evening the clouds cleared away, giving place to a lovely moonlit night. Nothing uncanny disturbed us through that day or through the night. Gervase locked his revolver away. Hilda laughed the ghosts to scorn.

"Can I speak to you, please, Miss Kate?"

It was on the second morning after breakfast that this request came to me from Mrs. Mark. I followed her to the kitchen. Mark was in the garden, digging up vegetables. She wanted to complain to me that some one had entered the previous evening, in spite of the locked gates.

"There were two of them, Miss Kate," she said, half mournfully, half wrathfully, "wrapt in long disguising cloaks, and pacing up and down yonder, outside this window. Wicked, designing creatures! Pounds and pounds of my savings have I lost through Johnny's business misfortunes, and I forgave it; but to stand by and see him run after like this is more than a poor woman can stand."

"But I think you must be mistaken," I returned, revolving possibilities and impossibilities. "Nobody could get in."

"Miss Kate, I saw them; I watched them," said she, impressively: "the night was as light as day. When young women are that forward that they'll come dangling after a handsome man at any price, it's not a locked gate that will keep 'em away. I did hope for peace here: but you see how soon they have found him out! Two curious looking figures it was, mincing about on the lawn there in the moonlight, the one taller than the other, and their ugly black cloaks and hoods covering their shawls and petticoats from head to heels."

I did not like it. Johnny's charms would never induce previously unknown girls to pace the damp grass on a cold spring night, however bright might be the moonbeams. Besides, how could they get in? The large gates were fast, and there was absolutely no other way of entrance whatever.

Evening came. I determined to watch, saying nothing, and stole out to the terrace. Who were these disguised people? The moon again shone full in a dark-blue sky, the stars were bright; but a chill wind blew over the gloomy lake, presaging a storm. The light from the parlour windows streamed across my path as I paced round to the sides and up and down; and, as I came and went, I saw Gervase and Hilda reading in the warmth of the fire. Through the uncurtained casement of the kitchen I could see also our servants: Eliza Mark was doing something at the table; John read aloud to her from a weekly newspaper they had brought from London.

Suddenly I saw in the kitchen a tall, indistinct figure muffled completely in a long black cloak. Its face was hidden under the hood. It stood behind Eliza. She started, and looked over her shoulder. Then it glided towards her husband. The paper dropped from his hand, and with an uneasy glance around he drew his chair nearer to his wife, and to the fire, picked up the paper, and went on reading. The figure disappeared.

"My short-sighted eyes have played me another trick," I said to myself, trying to reassure my beating heart. But, as I turned to resume my walk, the figure stood beside me!

Once, in mid-ocean, the ship in which I sailed was enveloped by an intense and terrible cold, and the sailors said (with truth) that an iceberg was drawing near. Just such a mortal chill, like the cold of the dead in their lonely graves, emanated from the object at my side! A vault-like odour filled the air. I stood motionless—unable to cry, or call for Gervase—feeling only that my heart would certainly

stop beating if the figure stirred. And, while I gazed, helplessly, the thing was gone!

I scarcely knew how I gained the house. I fancied something entered with me and passed in as I opened the parlour door. But I said nothing to Gervase and Hilda.

Great gusts of wind began to wail and moan across the lake. The branches of the trees below the terrace clashed together in a fury. The deep-set windows of our sitting-room shook in their frames as if an unseen hand were trying to drive them in.

But the room was very cheerful. Sir Rufus Saxon had left good stores of fuel for his tenants. Dry clumps of wood mixed with blocks of coal burnt upon the hearth, and the flames blazed half-way up the chimney. There was not a shaded corner in all the room.

"We are living rent free, in the midst of mystery, romance, antiquity, and beauty," observed Gervase, closing his book, "and we ought to make capital out of it. Kate, if you can conjure up a Christmas story in one volume, Hilda and I will illustrate it, and we will share the profits equally. And if nothing short of a ghost will suit the public, let us invent one."

As he spoke I saw the dark, shrouded figure standing behind his chair. The air became laden with that strange odour, and the deathly chill seemed to fill the room.

Gervase's eyes went round nervously, as if he expected to see something. Shuddering all over, he pulled his chair sharply further away from the wall, and looked behind it before he sat down again.

"How horribly cold this room has grown since the wind rose," exclaimed Hilda. "And what a peculiar smell! Gervase, what can it be?"

A second figure, draped in black, was now standing at her side, invisible to them, but plainly evident to me.

"*Something* is wrong," began Gervase, in a sort of perplexity. And he stopped short to heap more fuel on the fire.

"I feel as if the North Pole had come to pay us a visit," laughed Hilda, cowering over the blaze. "I hope the drainage is all right."

"John Mark and I will look to that to-morrow," concluded Gervase, glancing round the room again.

The figures had vanished. The oppressive odour and the deathly chill were gone. Gervase and Hilda, recovering their equanimity, began to discuss their sketches for the Christmas book. But I noticed that my brother made no further allusion to "the Ghost."

We retired at our usual time. I expected to lie awake for hours. Yet the moment my head touched the pillow I was sound asleep.

In the middle of the night I woke suddenly as if a hand had touched me. Hilda was sleeping: our room was a double-bedded one. I could see her quiet face by the light of the moon as it came from behind a cloud.

In the silent house—in the shut-up rooms of the Saxon family—

I plainly heard footsteps walking to and fro. A woman's voice, low and sweet, spoke. A man's deeper tones answered. Then came the sound of bitter wailing and weeping. And the footsteps went wearily up and down, up and down, until the morning dawned.

And still I said nothing of what I had seen and heard. I wanted to be more certain; I wanted to find things out. Hilda was not strong in health, either, and should not be needlessly alarmed.

In the afternoon, while my brother and sister were busy with their pencils, I went into the closed rooms to look about me. The walls were mostly of black oak, exquisitely carved. Some of the upper chambers had tapestry hangings; in the lower apartments were spindle-legged chairs, tables, and sofas; with Japanese cabinets of curious china, worth its weight in gold in these æsthetic days.

No tenant, as we afterwards heard, no caretaker, no servant could be induced to remain there. And so the tapestry hangings, the velvet curtains, the embroidered covering of chairs, tables, and sofas, were slowly fading and mouldering away for want of care.

I crossed a great banqueting hall, with a painted ceiling and a musician's gallery suspended from the wall. Opening an arched door, beneath this gallery, I found myself in a vaulted corridor, lighted from above by skylights, and hung with the portraits of the Saxon family; from the Sir Richard of Henry the Seventh's day (who built the grand "glass staircase," that gave the house its name), down to the Sir Rufus of our present time. They were a handsome, stately race; fair, with blue eyes and golden hair, as beseemed their name.

But at the lower end of the corridor, facing the door, I came upon two portraits in a double frame, placed quite apart from the rest, and utterly unlike them. A lovely woman attired in the garb of a nun, with sorrow and heart-break looking out from her beautiful dark grey eyes. And a tall stalwart man of thirty, dark as a Spaniard, wearing the armour of a knight. His large dark eyes were bent upon the lady, his face was sad and stern, clouded with the disappointment of a restless and unsatisfied heart. On a double shield above the portraits were carved the names, "Sir Raphael and Lady Aloysia Saxon." While a single shield below the frame bore, in raised black letters, the strange and terrible legend:

"DOOMED, BUT TOGETHER."

I could hear the roar of the wind among the trees beyond the lake. A heavy rain came beating down upon the skylight roof. Yet still I stood there, gazing at the picture. The gallery darkened, and the colouring of the pictures grew obscure. Suddenly a sensation as of great fear came over me, and I made haste to depart. In crossing the banqueting hall, on my way back to the western wing, I turned to glance up at the music gallery, though I know not why. It was no longer empty. The two figures stood there, a dull, strange light

shining around them. In its gleam, as the long dark garments floated aside, I thought I saw the shining of armour, and the white wimple and black veil of a nun.

Dinner was ready in the parlour. And after dinner, Gervase and Hilda, wishing they could drown the noise of the storm that was raging outside, again opened their beloved sketch books. I left them to it. Mrs. Mark passed me in the hall, with a beaming face.

"No fear of them hussies this evening, I'm glad to say, Miss Kate," she remarked. "Even for my Johnny, they'd not come trapesing about here such a night as this, when the wind's howling like mad. I can give my mind to his reading without worriting myself about them."

"Of course you can."

Unable to rest, I had come out to wander uneasily about the spacious hall, wondering what ought to be done, and what would come of it. By and by, I took Gervase's thick plaid from the stand and putting it on, over my own waterproof, let myself silently out at the porch door, which was not the large entrance door, and stood on the terrace, in the storm. The sweep of cold fresh air and the steady rainfall calmed my nerves and cooled my brain.

I began to hope, almost to think, that the half of what I had seen was but imagination; I felt glad that I had kept my own counsel, thus far. If these were really only foolish and superstitious fancies, hard work, such as Gervase and Hilda were beginning to do, and I meant to begin on the morrow, would speedily dispel them.

My eyes were bent upon the ground as I turned towards the house mentally debating this question. On the very first step of the porch, the icy cold, the deathly odour enveloped me like a garment. Looking up, I saw the two dark figures facing me, within reach of my hand; and I knew them for the doomed pair. The cloaks seemed to fall back. I saw the glistening armour of the knight; I saw the purple robe of the nun, a bleeding heart, surrounded by golden rays, embroidered on its breast. I saw them by the palest, strangest light that ever shone on mortal eyes.

The porch was dark. No ray from kitchen or parlour windows could shine upon this part of the terrace. Those unearthly faces were revealed at last, and were those I had admired in the painting: the stern, brave, handsome knight's, the sweet and lovely one of the nun: but alas! as they looked at me here they were the faces of the dead.

But a second, as it seemed, and they were gone; the figures and the pale light had vanished. How I got in I know not. I managed to open the parlour door quietly, and beckon to Gervase. He came out, one of the wax lights in his hand.

"Why, what is the matter with you, Kate?" he asked. "You look white and scared. You are trembling."

FRANK DADD.

R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"Gervase! Come with me, before Hilda misses us. I want you to tell me whether I am awake or dreaming, mad or sane."

Grasping his arm for protection, I led him to the picture gallery, and held the candle up in silence before the two portraits. "Sir Raphael and Lady Aloysia Saxon," read Gervase. "And what is this below? 'Doomed, but Together.' What in the world can that mean, Kate?"

"I know not. I dare not attempt to guess," I answered. And there, standing before the picture, I told him all. Of course no one will be surprised to hear that he heard it with the most entire and mortifying incredulity.

We went back to the banqueting hall; into its vast, silent, open space. A pale light, the light I had seen before, shone in the music gallery.

"Halloa! what's that?" cried Gervase. "A light, up there!"

"What *is* the light, Gervase? What is it like?"

"I don't know; I never saw anything the least like it," he answered with hesitation. "Come away, come away, Kate!" he went on in an altered tone. "For heaven's sake don't look up there!"

I did look; I was already looking. The two figures stood there with their dead faces.

"Come away!" repeated Gervase, throwing his arm around my waist. The candle dropped from my trembling hand, and was extinguished in the fall; the terror, suppressed before, was shaking me now. In an agony I clung to him and hid my eyes upon his arm.

"Bear up, Katie; don't faint; I can find the door!" he said, bravely. But I could hear the beating of his heart, as he felt his way through the black darkness of the room.

"Kate! Gervase!" cried Hilda's voice outside, as he laid his hand upon the door. "Why do you not answer me? You must know I am frightened, knocking for you here in the dark."

"We are here, all right: the candle is out," said Gervase, unfastening the door, and throwing it open. "There's nothing to be frightened at, Hilda. *Don't look up.*"

"In his agitation he spoke the warning unthinkingly, as Hilda pushed past us into the room.

"Don't look up?" she repeated in a puzzled tone; and naturally, woman-like, the very injunction caused her to look. The next instant she screamed, and fell fainting into Gervase's arms. The scream brought forward Mrs. Mark. Her voice was heard, energetically asking if anything was amiss.

"No," shouted Gervase. "Keep the door open. We are coming."

But Mrs. Mark, influenced by her ruling passion, could only come to one conclusion—that some of her husband's new admirers had gained entrance to the closed apartments. Nothing would have kept her back. As she came rushing through the long drawing-room with her candle, and we walked forward, a cold wind seemed to pass

us from the open door of the banqueting hall. And between us and our irate housekeeper appeared the two dark, shrouded forms.

"Why, there they are, ma'am! There they are, sir, just as I saw 'em, the two together, strolling afore our window on the grass-plat. Well, if this don't beat all for impudence that I ever did see! Miss Kate ——"

The dark figures turned to her, no longer dark. The ghastly light was shining around them, illuminating the steel of the armour, the robes of the nun, *and the two dead faces.*

With a more terrible scream than Hilda had given, Mrs. Mark backed a step; fascinated by the sight, she was unable to turn and flee. Her rubicund face became deathly white, then changed to a dull yellow.

"What does it mean?" she gasped.

The taller of the figures stretched forth his mailed arm, his skeleton hand, towards the door with a commanding gesture. "Depart!" it said, as plainly as silent motion can speak. "Depart, and trouble us no more." Any way, Gervase so understood it.

"Yes, and without delay," he said, as we got back, all in a heap, to the parlour.

Nobody thought of sleep that night. By eight o'clock the next morning all things were packed, and Mrs. Mark, looking very pale and subdued, made coffee for us in the house for the last time. Her husband had gone betimes to bring a cart and a fly to carry us away.

"I knew you'd not stay there long, sir," observed the station-master to Gervase, when he was taking the tickets to return to town. "Lots of people have tried it, but they all fly away again."

I was with Gervase when he went to deliver up the key to the solicitor who had let him the house. That gentleman listened to our report in silence.

"Well," said he at last, "I am glad you are safely out of it."

"Why do you let it to anybody?" asked Gervase.

"By direction of Sir Rufus Saxon. He has an idea—it is a tradition, I believe—that a stranger can, and some time *will*, break the spell that lies over it. I am told also, I expect with truth, that for months together nothing wrong will be heard or seen; and then the —the figures—just as you describe them—appear for a time again."

"What was the crime—if it was a crime—that doomed them to walk in this way, sir?" I put in.

The lawyer shook his head. "I do not rightly know, young lady. Rumours have certainly reached me: in fact, Sir Rufus has said a word or two in confidence; but the honour of a noble knightly family, otherwise irreproachable, seals my lips."

SOME ITALIANS AT HOME.

By the Author of "A German Silver Wedding."

I. 'VANNA AND NELLA.

"IT will be all right," said my aunt, "if Giorgio does not drop in!"

"Why shouldn't he," I asked. "Is there any vendetta between his family and the Countess Palfi's, or any other reason why they cannot meet?"

"My dear," said my aunt, trying to look scandalised, though in reality she thought it just as great nonsense as I did, "you know so little of Italian etiquette! Here is the Countess Palfi who offers to spend the evening with me, and bring her two daughters. They are not yet introduced; so were I to bring them in contact with a young unmarried man, and he a captain of Hussars to boot, I should be committing a breach of friendship and of etiquette, which the good Contessa would never forgive. Oh, I hope sincerely Giorgio will go somewhere else this evening."

"I should not trouble about it," I remarked. "The Contessa offers herself, and perhaps the Capitano offers himself, to spend an evening at your house: all Genoa knows you are not the hostess to refuse either."

My aunt being still an Englishwoman at heart, though the wife and widow of an Italian nobleman for nearly forty years, continued to grumble on this subject for the rest of the day: but for my own part I was rather amused to think of the possible fluttering of the Palfi dovecote through the unexpected appearance of Captain Giorgio, my late uncle's nephew.

Punctually at eight o'clock arrived the Contessa and her daughters. I thought I had never seen my aunt's big salon look so vast, unfurfurnished and impressive. Generally we spent the evenings at our friends' houses, or had receptions at our own, and the room filled with a brilliant, chattering crowd of visitors did not strike the English eye so painfully. To-night, it looked like some dim chapel, only lighted here and there by pairs of tall wax candles. The grand piano gloomed like a catafalque in one corner; in another was a little table of tea, where silver and white china and damask made a little gleaming point; but there seemed to be acres of brown, polished floor between, across which I steered my way heedfully, aware that Babetta had been applying a specially potent composition of beeswax to it that very day.

A sweeping curtsey to and from the Contessa Palfi, and then "the shake-hands" of England from each of the young ladies, who jumped up from their chairs as I approached, and stood "attention,"

as if they were going to be catechised, till the ceremony was satisfactorily performed. I was only about five years their senior, but, as I took a seat between them, I felt that I might have been their grandmother, so utterly childlike, helpless, ignorant of everything did they appear: like sheets of paper which had not yet received a single impression. They were dressed exactly alike in skimpy, white muslin gowns, which bore the unmistakable "sit" of the convent, and had doubtless figured already at numberless religious festivals; slim white cotton-clad ankles and sandalled shoes were crossed meekly in front of them, and little, brown hands, like the claws of birds, in black lace mittens, lay in their laps. But their faces would be splendid, I thought, when expression, life, interest came into them. They were just a trifle heavy as yet, and exasperatingly meek; but the eyes were deep and lustrous, and only wanted a spark of life's fire to light up the rest of the features into a glow of beauty.

Opposite us sat the Countess, talking vivaciously to my aunt. She was a big, very untidy woman, with fine eyes, enormously fat, and dressed in flimsy black grenadine, with a bare neck, on which shone a necklace of magnificent cameos; she waved a large black fan, and had evidently been a beauty. As I write of her, I observe what a number of adjectives have gone to her description; but she was a woman whose incongruity suggested a great many adjectives of a large, vague and contradictory character: it was hard to say if she were most vulgar or most refined.

In the background my aunt's man hovered over the tea-table, handling the big, English-made teapot as carefully as if it had been an Orsini bomb; while the Palfi's man-servant, without whom they would as soon have thought of coming out to spend the evening as without their shoes, condescendingly brought us each a cup of pallid tea, with an expression of face which said plainly: "I am here to wait on my ladies, but you can have some tea, too, de ma bonté, when they are served."

"Are you married?" began 'Vanna, the eldest girl, by way of starting the conversation on a good understanding of my position: "or betrothed?"

I explained that I was engaged to marry my cousin, and that the marriage would take place on my return to England in the summer.

"Tell us about it," screamed both the girls in shrill voices, which showed me that whatever else was undeveloped in their natures, curiosity, at all events, had been arrived at.

"And tell us, also, what the sposo is like," said Nella softly, and with a fearful look round, as if she had been speaking of something indiscreet. "'Vanna and I have never yet spoken to any unmarried gentleman, but next year we too will marry. Mamma and Stephano have already begun to see about it!"

Stephano being the man-servant, who was gliding about in the corner of the salon with our own Antonelli, this struck me as rather a

wonderful assertion, but Nella made it with as much serious simplicity as if she told me that Stephano was choosing a new lamp or broom. Then they turned, with the most vivid interest, to my photograph book, and demanded an instant introduction to "Signor Hugo," under which disguise I had some difficulty in recognising my cousin Hugh.

"Very amiable! very genteel! magnificent!" were the criticisms my fiancé's portrait elicited. They made me laugh, for I could picture Hugh's face if anyone in plain English had called him either genteel or amiable; while even with the young man of the period's capability for swallowing compliments, I do not think he could have digested "magnificent" without protest.

But the kind little girls thought to delight me, and besides were genuinely charmed with the contents of my book, asking numerous questions and displaying considerable quickness in picking out family connections. All Italians are naturally fond of pictures, and no smallest detail of costume, fashion, or feature escaped the sharp eyes of 'Vanna and Nella.

At last, however, something began to puzzle them. I saw it by the way that they looked across the book at each other and lifted their eyebrows, indicating one picture and then another.

'Vanna, the boldest, presently asked:

"You have more gentlemen's pictures, than of Signor Hugo. See here is a blond, and here a beard, and here is an officer of the Hussars, of our king's regiment. Have you been affianced so many times to *all* these?"

"No; these were friends of my own and my brother's; and this was the Capitano Giorgio Uccielli, my aunt's nephew, who belonged to the regiment of Hussars now quartered in the town."

Astonishing! that my mother—my aunt allowed me to receive and exhibit these photographs! "But," politely, "your customs are very much advanced of ours." Then to her sister: "Let us turn on quickly, Nella mia. Mamma and Stephano would not like to see us regarding the picture of an officer of this neighbourhood."

Indeed my aunt had not overstated the fact when she said I was lamentably ignorant of Italian etiquette. I began to perceive dimly that young men in the abstract (such as my Hugh) might be discussed, but that when it came nearer home the subject was tabooed by the mysterious influence of Stephano, the butler, and I longed more ardently than ever for the appearance of Giorgio. When my photograph book was exhausted, the girls laid it aside with profound thanks (it makes me laugh now to think of the Leporello-like list of conquests with which, they thought, its pages accredited me), and we talked of their life in the convent, which they had now left, of the villa to which they were going shortly, and of 'Sandro, their brother, who was fifteen, and attended the Military College. The Countess, who joined in our conversation now and then, spoke of her son as "Il Conte," and was bent on impressing us all with her grandeur.

And now, talk flagging a little, my aunt asked the girls if they had learnt to dance at the convent, and with a little pressing, they were persuaded to advance into the centre of the slippery brown parquet, and go through the most elaborate character dance for our entertainment. First they began with the solemnest faces imaginable, advancing and retiring, 'Vanna holding out her hands, and Nella shrinking away, with most carefully executed details and much pointing of the sandalled shoes. But soon the music with which the Countess accompanied them on the piano, grew faster and faster; the two girls sprang and whirled hither and thither about the dim room like two white spirits, snapping their fingers, pursuing each other, escaping, recrossing, until, with a burst of childish laughter, they flung themselves exhausted on the sofa.

"Brava! Brava!" we cried, as the music stopped with a crash, and "Brava! Brava!" echoed from the further end of the salon, where Giorgio had entered unperceived, and had been watching the finish of the dance.

The effect of his appearance upon the Palfis was extraordinary. A moment before the girls had been a pair of unembarrassed children, laughing, skipping, and excited, forgetful of everything but their southern nature's enjoyment of the dance. In an instant they became priggish, constrained, convent "misses," sitting bolt upright, and composing feet and hands, as they had been taught young ladies of quality should. Their mother bustled up, the very cameos on her neck bristling with horror. I could see my aunt's face actually pale with perturbation, and Stephano hovering close behind his mistress, as Giorgio advanced into the little oasis of light where we were clustered together. He was in uniform, of course, and glittered and sparkled with crimson and gold lace, like some wonderful being from another sphere, suddenly descending into our murky drawing-room. There was a half-smile of malicious triumph on the usually unruffled self-content of his features, as he bent low before the Countess Palfi, whom he had previously met in society; and then, after greeting his aunt and me, asked ceremoniously, and without any apparent consciousness of the mother's embarrassment, to be presented to her daughters.

There was no help for it! We had all heard the request, and the Countess Palfi knew too well the courtesy due to her hostess to refuse. Yet she hesitated, casting an imploring glance at my aunt, who pretended not to see it, and receiving an unqualified sign of disapprobation from Stephano, ere she stiffly introduced the Capitano Uccielli to the two motionless girls.

I looked at them to see how this first momentous introduction to an unmarried gentleman, of which we had just spoken as a remote possibility, would be received; but 'Vanna and Nella sat like two statues, gravely inclined their heads as their names were spoken, and never lifted their wonderful eyes from their two pairs of bronze shoes for an instant.

I was so disappointed. I wanted them to be a little interested, a little excited even, for of capability for excitement I had just seen them far from deficient: I hoped to see the Countess in a difficulty, and Stephano in a rage. But the girls were true to their convent training, and though Giorgio sat down between them and me, talking of everything that was most likely to arouse their interest, they uttered not a word, and threw the whole burden of the conversation upon me and my indifferent Italian.

The Captain and I were in the habit of speaking English together, he having picked up a considerable knowledge of our language from his aunt: this evening we might as well have talked English or Chinese for all the attention vouchsafed by the Palfi sisters. The Contessa was now sitting opposite us, on thorns evidently, though the behaviour of her daughters might have reassured her. Stephano, who had slipped away, I fancied to order the carriage, came back noiselessly, and whispered something which I took to be an intimation that it was in readiness; but in his absence a tray of refreshments had replaced the tea-things in the further corner, and my aunt, to restore the harmony of her party, was making a hospitable clatter with plates of cakes and tall glasses of lemonade, and pressing everyone to partake. The Countess gave longing looks at the side-table, for she was inordinately fond of sweets of all sorts, then distrustful glances across at her immoveable daughters, and seeming to be satisfied with their conduct, for a second time disregarded the warnings of her major domo, and settled down in her chair with the intention of letting the evening finish amicably.

This little bit of by-play served as an excellent opportunity for Giorgio, who while Stephano's attention was absorbed in his mistress, had deftly supplied the young ladies with plates of biscuits, and was now standing before them in a charmingly studied attitude of unstudied elegance, holding two long beakers of lemonade at just such an angle as should oblige the Signorini to lift their eyes as well as their hands to take them from him. I think he had his reward, as well, perhaps, as his revenge upon the Contessa; for when I looked again at the girls, after taking my own plate and glass from Antonelli, their faces were crimson and their hands were twitching nervously, as if perchance they had touched the jewelled fingers of the Captain as he handed their glasses. But the Captain's handsome face was then, as always, so imperturbably self-satisfied that nothing was to be guessed from that.

By-and-bye, when the visitors had left—the Countess on the deferential arm of Giorgio, and the two girls under the very eye of Stephano, that no parting amenities might be exchanged on getting into the carriage—I asked my aunt who the major domo was, and how he came to have attained such ascendancy over his mistress and her actions.

"I really don't know, except that the Countess Palfi is the weakest woman in existence," she answered, "and has allowed that man to

take possession of herself and her affairs in a manner which is highly undignified, and of which she will find it some day very difficult to break him. She tells me he is making enquiries far and wide about suitable matches for the girls, and this, of course, is necessary; but it would be more in keeping with the position of the Palfi family if the task were undertaken by some connection, uncle or brother-in-law of the Countess; or by the Countess's director, who could have been suitably rewarded for his trouble when the girls were established."

"But, good gracious, aunt!" I could not help exclaiming, "why are all these formularies necessary in the very simple matter of marrying two very simple girls like 'Vanna and Nella Palfi? Neither of them appears fit to marry at all for the next half-dozen years. They are utterly undeveloped, and appear more ignorant of life and its responsibilities than an English child of six is."

"They are lovely, charming, ravishing," broke in Giorgio returning from the hall. "Oh, my aunt, I was indeed in good luck when I made my way here this evening! what materials for a wife in either of those young ladies! what placability, what angelic sweetness! a man might mould them to be anything that he desired! Are there any brothers, my aunt, and where is their family estate?"

"Good-night, Captain Uccielli," I said. "I wish you all success in your moulding of a wife when you begin to turn your attention to that important operation. And good-night, aunty! I am glad I was born and am to be married in a land where it is not thought necessary for an uncle, a brother-in-law, a curate, or even a butler to find me a fiancé."

And with this parting shot I went to bed.

II. 'SANDRO.

I DO not know if Giorgio ever met the Palfi girls again during those spring weeks which we and they spent at Genoa, but I fancy the Contessa must have prevented all further intercourse beyond bows and recognitions in the street. My friendship with their family, however, increased. We met frequently, and as the girls were interested in England and everything English, I undertook to teach them a little of the language colloquially: they were too indolent and volatile to learn it systematically. Of Giorgio we never spoke, though incidental reference to the evening spent at my aunt's showed me that they regarded that occasion as a momentous adventure. But I think they had been lectured by their mother on the subject, or perhaps by the butler, and had been told to forget, if possible, an incident so unfortunate.

The girls grew fond of me, and Countess Palfi began to think that I was of value and assistance to them, so that when they left Genoa for their country villa, it was with protestations that I must come and see them there before I returned to England.

At the time I did not think it would be possible to accept the invitation ; but in consequence of some change in my aunt's plans, she was detained in Italy rather longer than was expected. Genoa had become very hot, for it was now May, and a formal invitation to the Villa Palfi, written in the Countess's niggling little hand, came in very opportunely, backed by enthusiastic notes from 'Vanna and Nella, begging me to come at such and such a time, because "their hearts could wait no longer."

My aunt was heartily glad to send me out of the heat, to which she herself was acclimatised ; and so it came to pass that, after nearly a whole day's travelling by rail and diligence, I accomplished the thirty miles which lay between Genoa and the Villa Palfi, and found myself descending in front of a little "osteria," into the arms of my two Italian friends, who had quite forgotten "the shake hands" in their delight, and were embracing me in the most overwhelming manner.

The little crowd of half-a-dozen villagers who had assembled to see the post-diligence change horses, regarded me curiously : first, because I was an English lady "come to stay," and then because an English lady who was so rapturously greeted by the "excellent and noble family," for whom il Conte himself was waiting, cap in hand, under a white umbrella, must indeed be something worth looking at.

For here was 'Sandro, too, standing a little behind his sisters, an amusing mixture of shyness and swagger. Coming forward with the most exaggerated gestures of welcome, he kissed my extended hand, and assured me theatrically, with emphatically rolling eyes, that he hoped his sisters' friend would condescend also to be his. Then, giving some lordly orders to an attendant footman, with prominent woollen epaulettes, to bring up my luggage on the hand-barrow which was in waiting, and somewhat detracted from the grandeur of the reception, he offered me his arm to conduct me up the village street, at the end of which stood the iron gates of the Palfi domain. Fortunately I was able to excuse myself from the honour, having a handful of travelling impedimenta, which I refused to relinquish.

This swaggering boy of fifteen had all the manners, or rather mannerisms, of an Italian town dandy, and took me patronisingly under his wing at once, though half an hour afterwards all his dignity had vanished in a shower of angry tears, as he struggled with Stephano for some fruit which the latter was arranging for dessert. Stephano cuffed the depredator soundly on both ears, and sent him away howling loudly ; but the Countess and her girls, who were entertaining me with lemonade at the window end of the long salle à manger, took no notice of this exhibition, and Stephano went on quietly with his preparations of the supper-table as if the Count's outburst were of very little importance. Indeed, such I soon found it to be, for 'Sandro's passionate explosions were of more than daily occurrence. He had been woefully spoilt, and was a perfect baby in

spite of his cadet's uniform, his sword, and his much-encouraged moustache, and I used to be thankful when dinner was got through safely without Stephano and his master coming to words and even blows.

The butler's behaviour puzzled me more and more as I became at home in the Villa Palfi, and could observe the odd mixture of deference and command with which he treated his employers.

For instance. At meal-time who so respectful as Stephano, gliding round with oily and highly-seasoned dishes, and offering them with the quietly trained manner of a servant whose only thought is for the comfort and welfare of those he serves; yet, in a moment, his manner would alter to the most insolent interference. "Signor Conte, you do not want any more wine!" "Eccellenza, that dish never suits you; do not try it." Or more plainly still: "Signora 'Vanna, let alone that fritura; you have had enough; you will be sick!" were his frequent injunctions, and if they were not attended to he would snatch away the dish in question, and leave the Countess looking disappointed, 'Vanna sulky, or 'Sandro in floods of angry tears, as the case might be.

But however inexplicable this conduct, it was not altogether unnecessary, for the whole Palfi family were greedy about food, and would doubtless have indulged themselves unrestrainedly but for Stephano. To me, I am happy to say, he never spoke in this strain, but whether because my conduct did not justify his interference, or because he thought me scarcely worth correcting, I do not know: I am sure he did not like me or my influence at the Villa.

In spite of these conflicting elements, life at Villa Palfi settled down into very comfortable monotony, which was acceptable to me after the whirl of entertaining and being entertained, in which my aunt and I had spent the last few hot weeks in Genoa. I found plenty of interest in observing the characters and customs of those around me. Of my hostess I saw but little; and, as we had not much in common, I did not regret that she spent her mornings in her own apartment—I believe, in bed—and never appeared till dinner-time—two o'clock.

A more utterly uneducated woman it is scarcely possible to conceive. She could certainly write a letter—that is to say, copy it; but its composition was her daughter's or her director's. She could read a vilely-printed, yellow-paper novel; but she could not tell you, when it was finished, a word of its contents; and I believe the same volume had served her for years. Her talk to her children was of dress, and to me of matrimony: my own approaching marriage, and our well-known English freedom of speech on the subject, took the veto off this otherwise proscribed question: and long and ardent were our discussions over the future prospects of the two girls, whenever they could be induced to leave my side and give their mother an opportunity of unburdening her mind in a disquisition, which it would have been highly indecorous for them to hear.

This was generally in the evenings, after supper, when the Contessa and I sat in the verandah together, 'Vanna banging an unsteady waltz in the room behind us, while Nella danced. Sometimes 'Sandro was her partner, if he happened to be in a specially good humour; but more often he was sulking in a corner of the garden, with some objectionable cigarettes of his own construction, and Nella was obliged to send for Guilletta, the girls' own little waiting-maid, who would scrub her face, roll down her white sleeves to her elbows, and come blushing and delighted to waltz with her young ladies.

With all her young people thus disposed of, the Contessa would feel at liberty to dilate to me on the difficulties attending a widowed lady of rank in suitably settling her daughters—on the perplexities of having to decide whether wealth compensated for rank, or rank for old family. Individual character or preference apparently played no part in the arrangements whatever. "When 'Sandro is returned to the Academy, next week, I shall be able to send Stephano to see the old Countess Cappalini. Her eldest son is married, but I understand the second will inherit no inconsiderable fortune from an uncle, so it may be worth enquiring into. Nella, my angel"—breaking off in the most barefaced way—"I was consulting the Signorina about retrimming your hat!" And so the girls' dancing being at an end, we would spend the rest of the evening discussing the pros and cons of fashion—the Contessa having certain conventional ideas about ladies' dress which the girls desired to see modified, in accordance with more modern taste and my dress, which they admired unceasingly.

'Vanna and Nella had altered very little in appearance since the first time I had met them in my aunt's salon. They were still the same childish, unformed-looking girls in skimpy convent dresses; their mother having explained to me that it was unnecessary to set them up with new clothes until their introduction in Florence or Rome next winter, which it was hoped would be coincident with the betrothal of one or both. It was of this wonderful presentation to society and its attendant paraphernalia of which we so often talked, till 'Sandro would come swaggering up and interrupt us, for which I could not but be grateful to him.

When he happened to be in a gracious mood he did me the honour to pay me considerable attentions, which were as ridiculous as his quarrels with Stephano. If I esteemed too lightly, or forgot to wear the flowers he brought me, I was treated to the most tragic behaviour. The girls would beg me to humour 'Sandro and allow him to kiss my hand occasionally as a means of insuring domestic tranquillity: and black looks reigned for a couple of days because I had not risen and made some appreciative sign from my window, in recognition of a twanging guitar serenade to which he treated me one night when he ought to have been in bed. Poor 'Sandro found me dreadfully unimpressionable, and would call me "Icicle," "Pillar of Marble,"

"Snow Queen," with his hand on his heart and his eyes rolling frantically. Once he asked me confidentially if I repulsed him because I was afraid of the possible jealousy of "Signor Hugo," and when I burst out laughing immoderately, he dashed away into the garden with his hand on his sword hilt, and appeared no more till dinner time.

It was therefore no wonder that I received with equanimity the Contessa's intimation that 'Sandro's leave was almost at an end. I knew we should be much more peaceful without the young thunderbomb, and besides I was quite anxious that Stephano should be at liberty to accomplish one of his expeditions as matrimonial ambassador while I still remained at the Villa Palfi.

One day I boldly attacked the subject of matrimony with Nella, who was creeping softly about my room looking at all my knick-knacks and belongings, while I rested on the sofa. We had been reading an English story-book together, and I had seen how interested the two girls were in the wooing and wedding of the heroine, asking indirect questions on the subject which showed considerable skill, though in accordance with their teaching they avoided all direct discussion on such a theme.

"Have you ever thought, Nella, whom you would like to marry?"

Nella looked at me with a startled expression, as if I had asked, "Have you ever thought whom you would like to murder?" but presently answered:

"You are so droll! Why should I think? that is mamma's affair, not mine!"

"But you will have to live with the husband, not your mamma, Nella. Should you like him old or young, lively or quiet, a soldier, or a lawyer, or a country gentleman? I know you have seen no gentlemen yet, but still you have formed some idea, surely, of the sort of person you would like to live with always?"

"I am so quiet and shy," began Nella, dispassionately appraising herself. "I had better have a gay young man, with plenty of good spirits, so that he can amuse himself well and not tire of me. 'Vanna is so lively, she had better marry a judge: an elderly man who will teach her to restrain herself."

"All this is very wise, Nella," I persisted; "but you have not yet told me what you would *like* yourself."

"I have met no gentlemen—at least, hardly any—only one," stammered poor truthful Nella, driven into a corner by my questions. "I think I should like to marry a Hussar officer!" and with this terrible confession, she escaped from my room.

By-and-bye I found my photograph book on a table behind my head, left open at the portrait of Giorgio Uccielli.

As the time for Sandro's return to the Academy drew near, every one tried to propitiate him, for fear that at the last moment he might turn troublesome, make an uproar and refuse to go at all. A

specially delicious supper was ordered for the night before his departure, and I knew by the suppressed giggling of the girls that some wonderful joke was on foot. The Contessa began the meal in tears, being easily moved to this ebullition of feeling and as easily diverted therefrom. By the time we had reached our second course, when a large silver dish containing a conical-shaped mass of what looked like sugar candy was mysteriously set in front of me, she was radiant again, clapping her hands, and begging the dear guest to help them to some of her confectionery.

Knowing that we must now have reached the dénouement of the pleasantry which had been convulsing 'Vanna and Nella all supper-time, I manfully attacked the ornamental structure with a spoon, and breaking in one side, out flew 'Vanna's canary bird in my face, fluttering and scattering sugar as he came, while the whole Palfi family nearly rolled off their chairs in helpless laughter. The sugar candy edifice was hollow and made like an extinguisher, so that it could easily be clapped down over the bird's head before it came on the table. Dicky was evidently quite accustomed to the joke, and knew exactly the right moment to burst out of concealment, though to the Palfis the performance appeared ever new, and served for conversation, which kept us all in good humour for the rest of the evening. "Have you anything so gracious, so droll, so genteel in England? Is it not preferable to your plompudding?"

"What are you going to give 'Sandro?" asked Nella the next morning, as we were all waiting to escort "Il Conte" down to the post to meet the diligence. In truth, I had not thought of giving him anything, and I suppose my looks confessed it, for Nella suggested, "'Sandro always wants money; will you put a little to this, which 'Vanna and I have for him?" showing a little silk bag, in which was a collection of battered Italian coins and dirty lira and half-lira notes.

I was so disgusted! The schoolboys I had been accustomed to in England certainly had a habit of remaining strictly en evidence on the eve of departure for school, so as to render the process of tipping as easy and feasible as possible; but never before had I heard of a tip being demanded in this way. However, as Nella seemed to expect something, I routed out a Japanese coin from my work-box, and, enclosing it in an envelope, added it to the "quête" in the little bag. Nella, who was too well-bred to observe me, was quite flattered at the pains I took in making up the little packet, begged me not to give too much, and informed her brother that I had contributed something handsome. The bag was not to be looked into until he was safely back at the Academy; and I had less scruple in playing him a trick which I knew would make him furiously angry, as he had often plagued me to give him a keepsake in his most sentimental manner. As the coach door closed upon him, weeping, and separated him from his weeping family, I could hardly restrain

my laughter, notwithstanding that I was parting, probably for ever, from Count Allessandro Palfi.

It was a few days after 'Sandro left us that my aunt summoned me back to Genoa, and we returned together to England. My approaching marriage occupied my thoughts, and though I often wondered how my friends were faring, and whether the Cappalini embassage had been successful, I had no time to enter on the perplexities of an Italian correspondence.

But in the following year, when my aunt was re-established in her winter quarters, came news of the Palfis. The girls were introduced and much admired; an uncle had turned up, and was managing the Contessa's affairs; there were suitors to the fore, and Stephano had received his congé, having been discovered in a long course of serious fraud and mismanagement. Not the least notable of his misdemeanours was, that he had intentionally put obstacles in the way of several good matches for the girls, knowing that if any matrimonial arrangements were made, the family money matters would be looked into and his defalcations discovered. I was glad to think they were all well rid of the undignified tyranny which the Contessa's foolish laziness had permitted Stephano to exercise.

"'Vanna's marriage," wrote Nella, a few months later, "was celebrated last week. We all rejoice in it, and in the happiness of calling the Eccellente Councillor Gregoriano our relative! He is a fine man of forty-five, and will at once give 'Vanna a carriage, a box at the Opera House, and all attention and conveniences. For myself, I have a piece of news to communicate, which fills me with a ravishing delight, and which will not be indifferent to your sympathetic heart. The Capitano Uccielli has applied to my mamma for permission to ally himself to me. You will remember him at Genoa and the night when we danced at the apartments of your dear aunt. He says he can never forget it. I am so happy in his preference that I feel Heaven is too good to me."

Poor little Nella! Her heart was awake at last, and its expression of feeling was the same that is natural to all true women, to whatever age or clime or class they belong. Nella will quickly become a little chattel to her handsome husband; but as long as her simple character retains its faith in its hero, she will enjoy a meed of happiness which even Eccellenza Giovanna Gregoriano—opera box, councillor, carriage and all—will not be able to surpass.

A MESMERIST OF THE YEARS GONE BY.

By the Author of "East Lynne."

ONE afternoon in the spring of 1854, two distinguished-looking men might have been seen in Paris, strolling along the Boulevard des Italiens. Handsome, tall, and straight of limb they were, with sufficient resemblance in the general air and contour of feature to prove that kindred blood united them—that of brotherhood. The elder was of dark hue and of resolute, but sombre, cast of countenance; while the fair features, with their ever-ready smile, the wavy auburn hair, and bright complexion of the younger, seemed to say that he was cast in a less stern mould.

They were descendants of the old nobility, the ancienne noblesse of the Faubourg St. Germain, a race which seemed to be gradually disappearing from the surface of revolutionised France. Their father was a St. Sévron, but he had been dead some years, and they had been reared in all the pride, the exclusive ideas, and the poverty of their mother, who was of the family of the De Montcarsons. Gaston, the younger, was serving in the French army, as yet but a lieutenant, but André pursued no occupation.

They had met by chance on the Boulevards, and Gaston put his arm through his brother's, and turned to pursue with him the same way. The utmost affection had always subsisted between them. The difference in their ages, ten years, caused Gaston to regard his elder brother with the love and reverence due to a father; whilst André was fervently attached to him, who in infancy had nestled his curly head upon his breast, as its resting-place, and looked up to him through his childish tears, and told him all his little troubles.

"Where were you bound to?" asked the elder brother.

"I was looking for Cartier. He promised to meet me, and he has missed his appointment. And you?"

"I don't know. Anywhere. Gaston! I am nearly sick of this inert life."

"By Jove! I'm nearly sick of having too much to do," laughed the more active younger brother. "What with morning drills and mid-day exercises, afternoon visits and gossip, and evening amusements, I seldom find the day long enough."

"You were born to see things couleur de rose!" grumbled the malancholy elder brother.

"What's the use of looking at them couleur de noir?" retorted Gaston. "It is a pity you are not in the army, André: there will be occupation enough, if this war goes on."

"*I* in the army!" haughtily returned André. "You are mocking

me. No, no. I must be my own master. If the Legitimists, indeed, were on the throne——but it is profitless to enter upon these topics with you."

"That it is," replied Gaston, good-humouredly. "I am content to enjoy things as I find them, without tormenting myself after what's past. There goes Cartier! Where's he off to, in that quarter?"

Unlinking his arm from his brother's, Gaston de St. Sévron set off, full speed, to catch his friend Cartier. André pursued his way till he came to the Rue de Rivoli, where he ascended to a handsome appartement in one of its handsome houses. As he was shown into the drawing-room, a lady rose to receive him, a quiet calm English lady of middle age, Mrs. Elliot.

She had come to Paris a year previously, with her niece, bringing, amongst other letters of introduction, one for old Madame de St. Sévron. The families had become intimate, for they mutually liked each other. Mrs. Elliot admired the fine old dame of the ancient régime, so resigned, yet still so simply grand in her fallen fortunes, and the two young Frenchmen began by liking Miss Alice Dare, and ended by loving her. She was so different, this English maiden, from all the young French ladies of their experience. Never losing the self-possession of her manners, her speech was frank, and her intercourse with them free and open as that of a sister. It surprised them with its novelty, while it charmed them with its pleasing trustingness; and when, at the end of three months' sojourn, the ladies quitted Paris, it may be questioned which of the two young men missed them most. "You will be sure to return?" they had said to her, and she had laughingly replied, "Perhaps yes: perhaps no." She did return. One frosty day, some months afterwards, in the January of 1854, if the old appartement of the St. Sévrons, which, dirty and confined as it was, was situated in the aristocratic quartier de St. Germain, could have looked down into the street, which it could not, being so high, it would have seen Miss Dare's carriage at the great door, and Miss Dare, followed by her aunt, stepping out of it, to gladden the eyes of poor Madame de St. Sévron. To gladden another person's also, who was sitting there; but let that pass for the present. Mrs. Elliot had no other home than the one she enjoyed as the protectress of Miss Dare: for Miss Dare was an orphan and an heiress, and moreover being of age, she was mistress of herself and her fine fortune. She could not boast of beauty, this young English lady, but there was a peculiar charm of manner about her which rendered her eminently attractive.

To return. When André de St. Sévron made his call this day, he found Mrs. Elliot alone, and sat with her, almost in silence, restlessly watching the door—watching for one who did not enter. Presently he asked whether mademoiselle was out.

"Alice is not out," replied Mrs. Elliot. "I fancy she is writing letters. Judith," she added, rising to speak to a young woman who sat

sewing in the ante-room, "see where Miss Alice is. Tell her Mr. de St. Sévron is here."

"My mistress is writing, ma'am," said the girl, presently returning. "She says she knew Mr. St. de Sévron was here, for she heard his voice, but she hopes he will excuse her, for she fears to be too late for the post."

A warmer shade, it could scarcely be called colour, rose in the dark cheek of André de St. Sévron. Ere it faded, to leave the face more sallow than before, the door opened and his brother entered.

He was at no loss for conversation. He chatted with Mrs. Elliot, he joked his brother on his idleness, he told a piquant anecdote of the day, he hummed over for them a song in the last new drama. And he did not break it off, the humming, when Miss Dare came in, but carried the tune through to the end.

"Will you pardon my rudeness?" he said, with his sunny smile, as he went up and held out his hand. "I had just caught the air, and Mrs. Elliot was anxious to hear it."

"You went, then, on Sunday night?" she exclaimed.

"To be sure," he replied. "I told you I should go. Don't frown, Miss Alice. You, in England, are taught to think these Sunday pleasures sins: it is part of our religion to enjoy them."

"Very good," returned Miss Dare, quietly. "But why do you say I frowned?"

"Because I feared you might. You must go and see this new drama, Miss Alice."

"Shall I get you places for to-night?" interposed André, eagerly. "It is creating a perfect furore."

"Then I think I shall wait till the furore's over," returned Miss Dare. "I don't like these crowded nights."

"Have you finished your letters, Alice?" said Mrs. Elliot.

"No. I got tired. They will do to-morrow."

"She would not come when she heard my voice: did she come at *his?*" asked André, of himself. And he continued to look at her, as she sat there smiling at the apt phrases of his gay and gallant brother. He rose to leave.

"Are you coming, Gaston?" he enquired.

"Not I; not for this hour," protested Gaston. "I am relating a story to Miss Alice, and you have interrupted it."

"What story?"

"Something Cartier told me to-day about the new Court and our charming Impératrice. I would advise you not to enquire particulars: they will not suit your Legitimist reverence."

André left the house, and made his way home to the Faubourg St. Germain. Toiling up the five flights of stairs, he opened the outer door of the apartment, with his pass-key. A very narrow ante-chamber, encumbered with trunks and firewood, passed, he found himself in the small and dingy sitting-room. The cloth was laid for dinner, and his

mother sat in an attitude of waiting, her hands and her black mittens crossed before her. She was remarkably like her eldest son, especially in the expression of the face and eye, half stern, half melancholy.

"It is a quarter-past five, my son, and Nannette is waiting to serve the soup," she said. "Have you seen your brother?"

"I left him in the Rue Rivoli," replied André. "Let us begin. I am sorry I kept you waiting, mother."

Nannette, an ancient dame, who had lived in Madame's family unheard-of years, and remembered some of its former grandeur, but who had long fallen to be the solitary maid-of-all-work, put the potage on the table, and they sat down to it. An hour afterwards, the repast concluded, Gaston was heard. He ascended the stairs in a great bustle, leaping up three at a time, and burst into the room.

"I hope you did not wait dinner for me!"

"No. But where have you been, my child!" It was the mother's familiar mode of expression: André was "my son," Gaston, "my child."

"I stayed on at Mrs. Elliot's, mother, unconscious of the time, and when I left, was astonished to find it was half-past five. Just then Cartier came up, and made me go to dine with him, knowing I should be late here."

"Where are you flying to now, child?" demanded Madame de St. Sévron, as Gaston opened the opposite door.

"To dress. I am going to the theatre: the Porte St. Martin. And it is late. I don't know who's not waiting for me."

He entered and closed the door, as he spoke. It was the joint dressing-room of himself and André. Their beds were in two enclosed recesses in the same chamber—shut-up cupboards, an English bedroom would call them. Madame de St. Sévron slept in a recess partitioned off from the ante-room, and where old Nannette slept never could be divined; unless it was on the pile of wood, outside, or on the poële in the kitchen.

Not long was Gaston dressing: he was never long over anything: and out he went, as dashing a young officer as Paris could show. André remained by the side of the fire, moodily looking into it. His mother sat, on the other side, lost in dreams of the nation's and her own departed greatness. As the clock struck eight, André rose and stretched himself.

"Going out, my son?"

"I shall take a stroll as far as the Porte St. Martin. They play a sterling afterpiece there to-night. Good night, dear mother. You may be in bed before I return."

André de St. Sévron reached the Porte St. Martin, but he found some difficulty in getting into the pit of the theatre. An attractive piece was on, and the audience were closely packed. He did manage, somehow, to wedge his way in, and obtain a side-view of the stage.

He obtained a view of something else. Ranging his eyes round the house, they were arrested by a box, amidst whose brilliant crowd was the distinguished form of his brother, laughing and talking to Miss Dare. *She* was not talking; she was only listening; the more dangerous pastime, in such a case, of the two; and André knew it.

André de St. Sévron looked no more at the stage. He bent his dark brows, and, covered by the crush and crowd around, watched keenly that box, in one of whose inmates all the hopes of his future life were concentred. Once he started up, and would have made for it, but he remembered his careless costume, and remained where he was. Before the close of the performance, he left the house, and walked rapidly home. His mother had retired, and André sat down before the nearly burnt-out fire. Mechanically, with the air of one whose mind knows not what his hands are doing, he pushed the pieces of wood together, that they might blaze up, and fell into a train of thought.

"Is it real or imaginary, this nightmare which oppresses me? For some time, ever since she returned to Paris, its shadows have hovered over me. They are growing darker: more dark than ever have they been to-day. If I thought he loved her, I think I could give her up—psha! a soldier-boy, of five-and-twenty, love? Not he. His heart is in his profession; in his amusements; in his companions, light and void of care as is the wind. Why, to tie that lad down to matrimony, even with her, would be like chaining him to the grave! And if she, if it be true"—André winced visibly—"if indeed her fancy is temporarily caught by him, the kinder course to him, to both, would be to remove him from the danger. I must look to it. Why did I suffer myself to become enthralled by this English girl? I, who have hitherto made a stone of my feelings as regards women? But—if one must marry sometime—as well Alice as another. We should be equally matched. Thirty-five years to her two-and-twenty: all well: the husband should have more experience than the wife. She has a large fortune, and I have an ancient name. What can either side desire more?"

Not many mornings after this, Paris awoke with the news that certain regiments were ordered to Marseilles, on their way to commence the war, now declared against Russia, the regiment in which Gaston de St. Sévron served not being one. "God be thanked!" murmured Madame de St. Sévron, though she said it not in the hearing of her sons. She owned a brave heart, this lady, one which did not disgrace her high lineage; and if needs must have been that her son had gone forth to meet his country's enemies, she would have struggled for a calm voice in which to bid God speed him. But there was something behind.

From the very first faint rumour of an impending war, certain mouldy prophecies, rummaged out from it is impossible to say what hidden archives of Paris, had been secretly circulated amongst parties

inimical to the war and to the new Imperial power. They had found their way to the hands of Madame de St. Sévron. Not much could she make out of them: those who were able to read them in their original Latin, professed to make more. They were written in the reigns of Charles IX. and Henri IV. They were carried down to, and indeed beyond, the present time, pointing clearly to a war to be begun in the year 1854 against Russia, and which would bring desolation in its train; famine, pestilence, and wholesale slaughter, till the earth should be partially disseminated. "Oh not for that," murmured Madame de St. Sévron, "did I bear my son. Engaged with an open, honourable enemy, he must take his chance and trust in Heaven; but famine—pestilence—indiscriminate butchery—my God, I thank Thee that he is spared the risk!" She did not tell her sons she had seen these old, yellow sheets of parchment: she knew that André would have haughtily sneered over them, and Gaston made merry.

In the afternoon of this day, so full of gossip and excitement for Paris, Gaston went to call in the Rue Rivoli. Alice Dare rose and stood by the centre table as he entered, glancing at him with a searching gaze. "Is it true?" were her first words, scarcely replying to his greeting.

"Is what true, Miss Alice?"

"That the war has begun? That you soldiers are ordered off?"

"True that we are ordered off. But the war has not actually begun. And it never may begin. Some of our wiseacres think it never will."

"Are *you* ordered out?" she continued, in a low voice.

"No: our regiment has not received the honour. We remain here."

She drew a long breath, as if relieved, took her hand from the table on which it had leaned, and sat down on her favourite sofa by the window. Her spirits seemed to rise high.

"Now don't impose upon us with the nonsense that you are disappointed!" she exclaimed, interrupting something he was saying to Mrs. Elliot. "You soldiers like to uphold your martial character, and so pretend to great bravery. Had you been ordered out, Monsieur Gaston, you might have gone with a downcast heart; or perhaps have invented some plausible excuse for staying at home, not caring to get into the way of cannon-balls."

"Alice! Alice!" remonstrated Mrs. Elliot. "She is fond of joking, Monsieur Gaston."

The young man's cheek and brow flushed a glowing red, showing that he felt her words. Not individually: for never did a braver or more courageous heart beat than that of Gaston de St. Sévron. And there was something in the conscious, averted eye of Alice, as she turned it from his gaze, which told him that she *knew* the reproach of cowardice never could come near him.

II.

WHAT could it be that André de St. Sévron was so busy over? For some days he was not seen in his old haunts; he did not call in the Rue Rivoli; he was only at home night and morning. He was mingling, instead, with military officers, a thing he rarely condescended to do; he was in and out of the bureau of financiers; he was haunting the cabinet of the ministers-at-war. The secret of the whole was, that he was endeavouring to accomplish the exchange of his brother from one regiment to another.

And he effected it. One afternoon it was settled.

André was at rest now. He had scarcely taken food for some days; but he now turned into a cheap restaurant, and dined for twenty-five sous, *he*, this proud descendant of the once-sumptuous régime. The lamps were lighted in the streets when he reached home, and he ascended the high staircase by feel, not by sight. His mother was reclining in her fauteuil, in the warm corner.

"You don't seem well, mother!" he exclaimed, affectionately, for both boys deeply loved and reverenced their mother. "Is it the old pain at your chest?"

"I am free to-night from bodily ailments, my son," replied Madame de St. Sévron, "but my spirits are unusually depressed. Some calamity seems to be hanging over me. My old friend, the Comtesse de Morny, was here this afternoon, and she was going on in a melancholy strain about this miserable war which is looming in the future. It set me thinking about Gaston. His regiment is left tranquil as yet; but how long may it remain so?"

"Mother," began André, in a hesitating voice, as he drew his chair close to hers, and took her hand, "it would be fortunate for Gaston to go out to the war. Do you know what I have been occupied with these last few days?"

"How should I know, my son?"

"I have been effecting for Gaston what his own luck did not effect for him. I have procured his exchange into one of these departing regiments."

The old lady turned her face slowly towards the speaker, and her lips parted as if with extreme astonishment or perplexity; not so much yet with terror, for her senses had not fully taken in the purport of the words.

"You can't imagine the trouble I had," continued André, "the officers, one and all, are so eager to get out, and be doing. Marshal St. Arnaud managed it at last. He knows what a fine fellow Gaston is."

Oh, the sharp, shrill cry of anguish that issued from the lips of Madame de St. Sévron! She clenched André's arm with a pressure of which he had deemed her aged and thin fingers incapable, and a torrent of reproaches burst from her.

"*You* have done this! *you* have acted the part of Judas by your own brother! You would drive him out to swell the dead on those far-off plains!—where the corpses are to lie in heaps, stricken down by war and pestilence!"

"Oh, mother! don't talk like that. War! pestilence! What pestilence? And as to war, our brave soldiers can hold their lines against the Russians. Whence got you such ideas?"

"They are not my ideas," interrupted Madame de St. Sévron, fiercely; "they are the revelations of one who lived and died ages ago. Every political event that has since come to pass in France is written down in these dread prophecies, especially those of later times: the Revolution; the murder of the king; *our* downfall; the rising of the Eagle, its triumph, its bloody sway, and then its fall; the Orleans dynasty; the Republic, swayed over by a second Eagle; the second Empire, and this fearful war which is to destroy the flower of the Western armies, and bring pestilence, famine, woe, madness in its train!"

"Dear mother," interposed the astonished André, "you must be lapsing into your dotage. Prophecies!" he continued, in a tone of haughty scorn. "Because some fools—though more knaves than fools—are circulating these wicked absurdities to answer their own ends, you must attach importance to them—*you!* Mother, be yourself again: remember you are a de Montcarson."

"I will be myself again when you are again a brother," she retorted. "What are we to do without Gaston? how exist, wanting him? Is he not the sunshine of our miserable household—is it not he, with his sweet temper and joyous spirit, that brings what ray of light comes into it? Has he not been something for us both to love—an end to live for—a continuous happiness to look forward to day by day as we awake? André! if you indeed drive my child out to death, may God forgive you, for I never will!"

At this moment the door of the inner room opened, and Gaston came out. He had been making ready for a party at Mrs. Elliot's.

"Gaston," exclaimed André, drawing up his tall form fearlessly, "our mother seems to have some mist before her eyes, causing her to see things in false colours. I have been exerting all the energy and influence I possess to advance your interest, and have succeeded in effecting an exchange for you into one of the regiments ordered to the East. It——"

"Parbleu! but I think you might have consulted me first!" ejaculated the amazed young soldier. "I may have interests that bind me, if possible, to Paris."

"Tush, my brother! guard against frittering away time until you become a useless dreamer, as I have done. I have had, in this step, but your true welfare at heart; I swear it to you, by the honour of our name! Go forth and prosper. Use your sword bravely, and come back to us a captain—a colonel—a general: no rank is inaccessible to him who shows himself a lion on the battle-field."

"The battle-field gives stepping-stones, and it blows off heads," returned the careless Gaston. "If I go out, I must bear my chance of one, as of the other; and I should flinch from neither."

Again that cry of anguish from Madame de St. Sévron, but this time it was low and wailing, as she threw her feeble hands round her boy. "Oh, Gaston, my latest born!" she murmured, "if you die out there, you take my life with you!"

André looked on, and saw, and heard. He might have hesitated, might have endeavoured to undo his work, but that he truly believed the interest of Gaston lay in his being in active service.

It was late in the evening when Gaston de St. Sévron entered the reception-rooms of Mrs. Elliot. A gay party was assembled. In the course of the night he contrived to find himself alone with Miss Dare. Some people were at cards, and others had gathered round the piano, where a lady was shrieking through some Italian songs.

"Why have you brought me into this room?" demanded Alice. "There's no one in it, you see."

"That is why I did bring you," replied Gaston. "I may not be able to call upon you again, so I would say a word of adieu to you now: and I hate saying it in a crowd."

"Just tell me what you mean!" she exclaimed. "I don't like riddles. Take leave till when? till to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, no!" he replied. "Probably for ever. I am going out to the East. Ere eight-and-forty hours, we shall be on our road."

Her face, even her lips, turned of a ghastly whiteness. Gaston saw it.

"Why did you deceive me?" was her first question. "The other day, you said your regiment remained in Paris."

"The regiment remains. But I have exchanged into one going out. You did me the honour to suggest that, were I ordered off, I might be capable of inventing some disgraceful ruse to evade it," he added, determined to hazard a little joke. "Do you not think the insinuation was enough to make a fellow apply for permission to seek the risk?"

"Oh, Gaston!" she exclaimed, wildly, her livid features one keen expression of dismay, "do not torture me! You knew that all I said was but in jest."

"How could I know it? On my honour, I did not know whether you were in jest or earnest."

"You are but jesting with me now!" she uttered, laying her trembling hands upon his arm in her excitement.

"Alice, my love, why this emotion?" he whispered, more tenderly than he had ever permitted himself to speak to her. "Sit down and be calm."

"You are not going!" she exclaimed, in agitation, rising her head and checking the tears, as the colour flashed into her cheeks. "And I am foolish and nervous to-night. But you are not going?"

"My dear Alice, I am assuredly going. But when I said I made the exchange in consequence of your observations to me, that was not true. I never applied—I never wished to apply, or to leave Paris: and till eight o'clock this night, I knew no more of the matter than you knew. It is André who has done it. He believes that my interests lie in being in active service, and he has exerted himself to effect an exchange. I am now in the —— regiment."

The first shock had passed, and she was still and quiet. "When do you leave?" she asked.

"The day after to-morrow."

"And when return?"

"Alice! as well enquire when the next comet will be discovered, or any other event which may or may not happen. If I do return, you are the first friend I shall seek a welcome from. And now I must leave you."

She stood up by his side, her eyes cast down, and her cheeks crimson. He took her hand in his, and pressed it to his heart. He did more. He threw his arm round her waist, and kissed, five or six times, those glowing cheeks, and she resisted not. But when he had finally left the room, she flew upstairs to her chamber, and, bolting herself within, indulged in an hysterical burst of tears.

III.

The following summer was one of suspense and anxiety to many people; to France, as well as to our own country. Sickness was not spared to the French capital, any more than to ours; and varied reports from the East, where the allied armies were gathered, kept up a continual excitement. Now they were at Malta, now at Gallipoli, now some of them at Constantinople, and now in the desert plains surrounding Varna. Rumours came to Paris of minor engagements with the enemy, more than rumours of fearfully devastating sickness: but a brave heart sat in every Parisian breast. "The British Lion and the French Eagle," they shouted, "can never be subdued!"

Several letters arrived from Gaston de St. Sévron: to his mother, to André, to former companions: letters as gay as himself. It was evident he contrived to lead a merry life amidst all the discomforts that attended the army; but Gaston carried happiness with him in his own sunny heart. André de St. Sévron had made no progress in his wooing—if it was wooing he meant. A few days after the departure of Gaston, Miss Dare had left, with her aunt, for Switzerland. "I am tired of Paris," was her reply to Mrs. Elliot's comment upon the suddenness of her resolution.

Now at that period, as is well remembered yet, a certain class of people had begun to exercise a wonderful influence in Paris—the mesmerists. Some persons called them charlatans; others bowed to their power, and were terrified at it. One of them was especially

noted for her revelations, a woman; but for obvious reasons her name is not given here. It was a recognised fact that many a heavy transaction was done on the Bourse, the secret incentive to which was neither more nor less than a séance with one or other of the mesmerists regarding news from the seat of war. It was a curious thing, difficult to understand—that they should be able to reveal events passing in the far-off East. And when, days afterwards, authentic tidings would come to prove their truth, people knew not what to think. Their fame grew. Individuals of all classes, high and low, scoffers once, scrupled not to consult the mesmerists in secret—few of them cared to own it. One gentleman, a well-known financier in Parisian circles, was banteringly accused, in evening society, of having gone that morning to visit one. He indignantly denied it, and was believed. Nevertheless, he had been. They assumed to possess the power of revealing everything; from the general doings of the army, to the thoughts and movements of those forming it.

One day, towards the latter end of September, André de St. Sévron was dragging himself and his legs along the Tuileries gardens, in his usual listless mood, when he suddenly encountered Miss Dare and her maid. He brightened up to energy.

"This is indeed an unexpected pleasure!" he exclaimed. "When did you arrive?"

"Last night," she replied; "and we have seen no one yet. What news is there?"

"The troops have landed in the Crimea," said André, thinking the word "news" could only refer to the all-engrossing topic. "Where is Mrs. Elliot?"

"She was busy with her packing-cases when I came out. I expect her to join me presently. Do you mind sitting down, for I am tired with yesterday's journey? Judith," she continued, turning to the girl, "you can go and execute the commission my aunt gave you. You will find me here." And the servant departed on her errand, and André sat down on the bench by Miss Dare's side.

"Have you heard recently from your brother?" she enquired, turning her face away.

"No, we have not," answered André. "His letters used to come pretty regularly at first, but latterly we have received none. I may confess to you that I am getting anxious. Not that there's fear on Gaston's account, for if anything unfortunately happened to him, his brother-officers would write, but my poor mother torments herself out of her life. She is now a mere skeleton."

"I attach no importance to the non-receipt of letters from this allied expedition of ours," observed Miss Dare. "My aunt has a son out there, a young ensign, and though we know he writes regularly, more of his letters are lost, or delayed, than come to hand."

"There has been a disagreeable rumour flying about Paris these last few hours," proceeded André, unconsciously dropping his voice,

"but I cannot find that it proceeds from any source save the prolific brains of the mesmerists. I was at the Telegraph-office this morning, and nothing of it had been heard there."

"Mesmerists!" exclaimed Miss Dare. "Are they busying themselves about the war?"

"They are: and, what's worse, they keep Paris in a hotter fever than it would otherwise be. Some events, it cannot be denied, they have described exactly; aye, nearly in the very hour in which they occurred."

"But what is this present rumour you allude to?"

"I don't put any faith in it," said André, imperiously. Yet his uneasy, nervous movement, as he spoke, proved he *did*. "It is, that the troops have landed in Crimea—but that was known—that some days afterwards, upon encountering the Russians, a desperate battle ensued, and that thousands of the allies, men and officers, are down."

Miss Dare compressed her lips. "But, you say, even the telegraph has no news of this?" she observed, in a cheerful voice, after some minutes' thought.

"No, no; it all comes from these infernal mesmerists—I beg your pardon for the word. But, you see, as they have been right before, they may be again. I have been in a state of worry since the morning, lest the report should reach my mother."

"Have you been yourself to consult the mesmerists?" enquired Miss Dare.

"Thank you. There are enough idiots who go, without my making one."

"Then, were I you, I should go and hear what they do say," she rejoined, firmly, "and exercise my own judgment as to whether there was anything in it. It seems to me that such imposture, if it be imposture, must be readily detected."

André de St. Sévron sat silent. He did not choose to confess to her that it was the very plan he had been debating in his own mind.

"Do ladies go?" proceeded Miss Dare.

"Some have gone. I suppose you are aware that we have women speculators on the Bourse as well as men. And it is chiefly for these speculations that the clairvoyantes are consulted."

"Do you know," she said, in a low, timid voice, "I should much like to go."

"Go where?" ejaculated André.

"To hear, or see—which do you call it?—one of these mesmerists. It has never fallen to my chance to be present at any of their exhibitions, though I have often wished it. Why not now, as well as at another time? Will you take me, André?"

"You English demoiselles are remarkably independent!" was André's observation,

"Yes," she said, "it is our privilege. But we retain our dignity

and self-possession, André, and no harm can come near us. Will you go?"

"If you are in earnest in wishing it. When shall it be? Some hour that will suit Mrs. Elliot."

"I will not have Mrs. Elliot, or tell her of it," interrupted Miss Dare. "I ask you to accompany me, because it might not be right for a young lady to appear there alone. Take me to the first of them all; the woman with the wonderful reputation. I will be ready this evening."

"At what hour?"

"Seven."

It was before a house in the neighbourhood ot the Rue St. Denis, that a hired citadine stopped that night, soon after the hour named by Miss Dare. She stepped out of it, attended by André de St. Sévron. Her own man-servant sat on the box with the driver. This may be looked upon as a curious adventure for her, or any other English lady, to engage in, but she was troubled and anxious, and thought not of forms and ceremonies; and she went through with it.

It was the house of the renowned mesmerist, for André had obeyed her wishes. They were shown into the waiting room, a sort of badly-furnished and worse-lighted salle-à-manger, and were told they would soon be called for, but the clairvoyante was just then engaged.

Alice Dare grew impatient at the delay, and began to pace the room. Perhaps she did not feel quite satisfied with what she had undertaken. "If we are kept here much longer," she observed to her companion, "I shall return."

André opened the door, with a view of looking for the person who had shown them in. He could see no one. On the right was the staircase they had ascended; on the left, a long corridor, which was lighted by a bit of candle, stuck in a tin sconce nailed to the wall. Suddenly, as he stood, a door at the extreme end of the passage opened and closed, and a gentleman was walking down the passage towards him. It was a friend of St. Sévron's, a man of sixty years.

"What! you here, St. Sévron!" was the exclamation. "Have you, the cynical, come to pray advice of the oracle?"

"I may retort by the same question," replied St. Sévron, drawing-to the door behind him, that Alice might not be seen. "What has the oracle done for you?"

"Little for me, by all that's sombre!" replied the old man. "If what she says is true, the funds will go down awfully."

"What does she say?"

"You'll hear enough, if you go in, without my telling you. One thing I trust she may be wrong in—that St. Arnaud's dead."

"Bah!"

"She affirms it. Not killed in the battle. Died of natural disease after it—after another attack of cholera!* I say! a compact?"

"Well?" returned St. Sévron.

"That neither of us has seen the other here."

"Be it so."

As the gentleman passed down the staircase, St. Sévron and Miss Dare were summoned to the reception-room. A woman, attired in black silk, with a white bandage over her eyes, leant back asleep—at least was in the attitude of sleep—in an easy-chair. A man, short of stature, with round, cunning eyes, likewise dressed in black, and well dressed, sat at a table.

"You must put your questions to Madame through me," he observed to the visitors. "What is it you wish to know?"

"Of the welfare of one who is serving in the Crimea," rejoined André. "An officer."

"Have you aught belonging to him about you?" enquired the man.

"I have a piece of his hair and a letter," was St. Sévron's reply. For, be it observed, the last time Gaston wrote to his mother from Varna, he enclosed to her a lock of his hair, according to a request she had made. This letter and hair André had borrowed, for that evening, knowing something of the requisitions of the mesmerists. The man returned the letter to André as useless, but he took the hair, *and placed it on the top of the woman's head.*

The woman became restless, stirred, and sighed heavily. It was some minutes before she spoke.

"What do you see?" enquired the man of her. "How is he employed now, from whom that hair was severed?"

"I see a plain whose heights are rugged and uneven," she murmured. "I see it strewn with corpses. They are burying them; but they are often called off. There are many wounded, hundreds upon hundreds. I see a wide expanse of water, and ships——"

"Is he, who owns that hair amongst the wounded? Ask her," interrupted André, eagerly, whilst Alice clung to his arm, partly in suspense, partly in terror. And the man put the question.

"I cannot find him," she went on to murmur, speaking at intervals, and with difficulty. "Ah! I see now. His luxuriant hair is fair and bright, but it is all bloody, and his face is white, and his jaw fallen. He is with the dead."

"Dead!" breathed André, who, much as he despised himself for it, could not shake off the feeling of horror that was creeping over him.

"Dead. One—two—three—four wounds, all in front. He died bravely. Stay! stay! they have come to him—they are taking him—now they search his pockets—there's a knife, and letters, and—and

* It is certain that the death, and its cause, of Marshal de St. Arnaud was positively affirmed in secret, in Paris, some days before the telegraph brought news of the fact.

things I can't see—they get in the light. Where to now? There they go! Ah! they are bearing him to the great pit, where so many are being thrown."

Nothing more could he get out of the woman—and the reader will probably think this was quite enough. She went rambling on to other sights she saw, or made believe to see, on the battle-field. André de St. Sévron conducted his companion from the room. She never spoke a word; nor he. But in the coach he recovered his spirits. His common sense and judgment returned to him with the fading away of the mesmeric scene, and he no longer condescended to admit apprehension for the fate of his brother. "It was all absurd; nothing but a clap-trap; a disgraceful mode of swindling the credulous out of money!" he indignantly exclaimed, but he was interrupted by the sound of a sob, and turning to Miss Dare, he found she was weeping silently. He went over to the side of the coach where she sat, and took her hand, and essayed to soothe her. But she shrank from him.

"Nay, do not push me away, Alice," he whispered, affectionately; "suffer me to comfort you. I have long hoped that I might be your comforter through life. I should have told you this in the spring, but for your sudden departure from Paris. I have only waited your return to speak."

"You my soother in life!" she passionately exclaimed, through her convulsive sobs—"you, who plotted and worked in slyness and in secret till you succeeded in driving your brave brother out to the death he has met!"

"Hush, hush, Alice," remonstrated André; "my brother has met with no death. How can you suffer the ridiculous farce we have come from to scare away your reason? Alice, you are the only woman I ever cared for: you must promise to be my dear wife."

"Listen!" spoke Miss Dare, arresting her sobs by a resolute effort. "I will tell you a history. I might shrink from repeating it at most times, but this night I am in no mood to stand on ceremony. I am the promised wife of one in my own land. When I engaged myself, I thought I liked him; and so I did. But I came to Paris; I saw your brother; I became intimate with him; and then I found I had mistaken liking for love. André de St. Sévron, I loved your brother; *I loved him;* had you not forced him from me, I know that in time I should have been his wife, for I would have given up that other engagement at his bidding. Are you answered?"

"These fancies will wear away in time," observed André, gloomily. "Let me hope——"

"Hope nothing," interrupted Alice, with fearless impetuosity. "When these fancies, as you call them, shall have worn away, I shall marry him who is waiting for me; and perhaps not make him the less good wife, because I, for a few months, passionately loved one who is in his grave."

"I would endeavour to render you happy, Alice," he persisted, clinging even against hope.

"Your endeavours have not been so directed hitherto," she retorted. "You have contrived to tear from me what romance I had in life; you have been the means of slaying your brother. Look there, André de St. Sévron!" she suddenly exclaimed, pulling him towards the coach window, "do you see these men who are passing home from their day's work—some in blouses, some in rags?—there is not one amongst them that I would not marry in preference to you!"

He left Alice Dare at her residence; and, dismissing the citadine, walked, with the moody step of grief and despair, to the Faubourg St. Germain. Her reproaches had told home. If it should indeed prove that Gaston had fallen, why, *he* had driven him out to perish. And what would be his own future? To live on alone—to hear that *she* had married one of her own nation, one to whom she had been engaged for years! He looked across the fireplace at his poor old mother, now so near her end, but there was no comfort for him there. Comfort! Even her life he had contributed to shorten. André de St. Sévron was apt to say he was born under a miserable star, but never had he felt the conviction so keenly as on that night.

Some days afterwards, on Sunday, the 1st of October, came the official tidings of the battle of the Alma. And when the lists of killed and wounded appeared, the name of Gaston de St. Sévron was amongst the slain.

A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE.

By Minnie Douglas.

THE waiters watched his slightest movement, and attended to his wants in a manner seldom witnessed. Was he not the richest American, or, at any rate, the most liberal, who had taken up his abode at the Langham this year? There is some pleasure in waiting on a gentleman who tips half-a-sovereign as freely as an Englishman does a shilling!

Mr. Jonathan Lee was evidently a millionaire, and a man who understood how to enjoy himself. His wife was a thin, overdressed woman of forty, whose face had once been pretty, but that was long ago; and whose aim in life, being childless, was the acquisition of new clothes and jewellery. She never tired of changing her dresses, and was rarely seen wearing one a second time in public.

Mr. Lee had a passion for sending telegrams. He seldom wrote a letter, but bombarded his friends with messages on matters of no importance—always, to do him justice, prepaying a reply.

One day—it was one of our horrid days, and an east wind was blowing—Mrs. Lee observed: "I can't see the use of paying a shilling for a telegram that nobody cares to get."

"And what's the use of giving forty guineas for a dress that nobody cares to see?" retorted Mr. Lee: which caused his wife to flounce the one she was then wearing into the nearest arm-chair, where she devoted her attention to the last fashion-book.

But one day there came a telegram which had crossed the Atlantic, and the news it contained, whether it were good or bad, caused Mr. Jonathan Lee to take an affectionate leave of his wife, previous to starting on a short journey. The wording of the message was this:

"English gent has got the papers."

Amongst the woods and hills of Surrey stands a fine old stone mansion belonging to Sir Andrew Gordon. In the library of the house the members of the family were assembled one evening, and the family consisted of the old baronet and his son Archibald, an antiquated aunt of the latter, Miss Dorothy Gordon, and Constance Gwyn, Sir Andrew's ward, a beautiful girl of nearly eighteen.

"There will be a storm to-night. Hark how the wind is rising!" said Miss Dorothy, with a shiver. "It's a mercy your travels are over, Andrew."

"Yes," said the old man, holding his hands towards the fire; "I am better pleased with the safety of my own stone walls than the best mail steamer that ever crossed the Atlantic. But now I'll ring

for lights; and, Archie, my boy, come over and try to understand some of the mysteries contained in these yellow papers."

Archie, a handsome, fair-haired fellow of twenty-three, had been resting at full length—and that was over six feet—on a comfortable sofa, watching lazily the charming figure of his father's ward, who persistently looked every way but his.

"I'll come; but I don't suppose I shall make anything out of them," he answered, rising slowly.

"My boy, it is most important—quite a fortune for you! Your poor mother never knew of it," were the words Constance heard as she sat idly in her low chair near the fire. "The papers are worth two thousand a year! That rascal who has kept them back would give something to know where they are now!" chuckled the old baronet, as he spread out the crackling letters and a large sheet of parchment on a table, the butler meanwhile arranging a reading-lamp to suit his master in so leisurely a manner as to call forth an impatient exclamation of "That will do! that will do!"

Simmons respectfully took the hint, and now busied himself with the heavy curtains, having noiselessly closed the shutters.

"There is a shocking draught," murmured Miss Dorothy. "Don't you feel it, Constance?"

"Not a bit," replied Constance, laughing as she rose to get her work-basket; "but the wind *will* get in such a night as this."

Simmons retired, and Archie observed:

"I'm awfully glad that fellow is leaving—he walks like a cat!"

"Indeed," cried Miss Dorothy, querulously, "I think your father does wrong to part with him; we have never had so quiet a servant."

"Never mind the man—attend to me!" cried Sir Andrew. "You must particularly try to remember this." Archie, only outwardly listening, was exhibiting some of those provoking symptoms which a lover shows after there has been a cloud in the atmosphere, and the lady has managed to get the best of it.

Constance Gwyn seemed to remember something, and left the room. When she returned after a quarter of an hour's absence, the butler had entered with a tray of glasses and the requisites for Sir Andrew's "nightcap" of whisky toddy. The baronet folded the papers into a neat bundle, and locked them in an old-fashioned cabinet.

"They will be safe here to-night; to-morrow I will take them to the lawyer's," he said, placing the key in his pocket. Then turning towards his ward, he enquired, "How is Gelert, fair lady?"

"I don't think he is well, Sir Andrew. I've just been to see him."

"Constance!" cried Miss Dorothy, scandalised, "have you been out to the dog-kennel at this hour, and on such a night?"

"Yes, Miss Dorothy—and it is much too cold for the poor fellow to be left out there!"

"Now, my love!" deprecated the old lady, waving one delicate

hand in token that her will was law, "never mention the idea of bringing that enormous dog into the house."

The ghost of a pout came into Constance's sweet face.

"There, there," said Sir Andrew merrily, "don't fret, Constance. Gelert shall have a skilled physician to-morrow, if you think him ill. *I* shouldn't mind his coming into the house, but our tyrant here, you see!" and he shrugged his shoulders.

"Archie," softly whispered the girl, as he lit her candle for her "will you see Gelert?" and she raised her beautiful grey eyes appealingly to his. A merry look of triumph passed over his face.

"Yes, if you promise not to play chess with the curate to-morrow!"

"Oh, don't be silly! If you think Gelert is ill, bring him in."

"Ill or well, I'll send him to your room in half an hour, if you'll say good-night civilly," at the same time drawing his fiancée behind a tall screen for a silent embrace, which sent her away blushing.

A bright fire burned in Constance Gwyn's bed-room. She put on her dressing-gown, and dismissed her maid as soon as the latter had received Gelert from Archie Gordon's hands, and brought him to his mistress. The dog was only seeking company, and not ill. He looked the picture of contentment as he lay at Constance's feet, and she, feeling wakeful, sat quietly reading—though between the page and her eyes came up Archie's face.

The house had long been still, when the clock in the corridor struck one. Gelert at the moment raised his huge head and listened attentively. Constance closed her book, and wondered why the dog still kept his intent look; it made her slightly nervous, and she began to listen too. Certainly there was a sound as of a window in the library, just beneath her own room, being opened. The wind and rain made so wild a sound that she would have banished the thought of anything but these, had it not been that Gelert half rose to his feet with a low growl.

"Be quiet, Gelert!" she whispered: for she feared he would bark, and so reveal to Miss Dorothy his forbidden presence.

Gelert's only answer was to look earnestly at his mistress, prick his ears again, and walk slowly to the door.

Constance went into the corridor to listen. The only person near her was nervous Miss Dorothy, whom she dreaded to rouse. Taking firm hold of Gelert's collar, she softly reached the top of the grand staircase, and a gleam of moonlight, which burst through the stormy clouds, lit up with a weird light the portraits that lined the wall, and then as suddenly faded. In the darkness Gelert drew his mistress to the staircase, showing increased anxiety to make her understand that there was a cause for his excitement. Constance leant over the bannister. The door of the library was partly open and a faint light was in the room. In a moment a thought of the papers Sir Andrew had just brought from America flashed on Constance; she remem-

bered that they were of importance to Archie, and that someone else would be glad to get them from him.

Whispering a few words to quiet the dog, she crept softly down the broad stone staircase, and paused near the door. Through the crack she saw that two men stood at the far end near Sir Andrew's cabinet, and it was open. A strange courage came to the girl. She knew that if she could cross to the corner by the opposite window, there was a bell there which communicated with the wing where Sir Andrew slept and which would also arouse the servants. In another moment she had stooped and clasped one arm round the dog's neck, and he seemed to know her wish, for he crawled stealthily beside her into the room. They had nearly crossed it, when Gelert drew a panting breath, which startled one of the men. He quickly turned and aimed a pistol at Constance. In an instant she loosed Gelert and sprang at the bell—heard the peal ring out, a pistol-shot fired, and a dog's furious worrying—then fell unconscious on the floor.

"How quiet you all are!" and then Constance thought she had not said it—such a faint voice it sounded. And what bed was this with great green curtains? Surely Miss Dorothy's! And the room was dim, so when Miss Dorothy crept to the side of the bed Constance could not see that her face was wet with thankful tears.

"My love, you are in my room because I am nursing you."

"Have I been ill?" said the weak voice again.

"Yes, dear, but don't talk." And Miss Dorothy slipped away to come back with the old doctor and Sir Andrew. The patient's eyes wandered towards the door. Sir Andrew whispered a few words to the doctor.

"Oh, there's somebody else, is there? Well, he may come just for a minute."

The "Somebody" had been outside, waiting.

"My darling," he whispered, holding the weak little hand.

Constance looked up in his face, trying to remember something.

"Did we quarrel about—chess—or somebody?"

"Oh, *that's* all right," answered Archie, eagerly. "You checkmated me."

"Well, but who was shot?"

"That will do now, my dear," said the good doctor, hastily, motioning all but Miss Dorothy away. "If you are a good girl and go to sleep, you shall talk to them all by-and-bye."

In the library Sir Andrew told the following to his son:

"When I was twenty-eight years of age I was still dependent on my uncle, who, though he could not keep the title from me, had the power of alienating the property. He wished me to marry his daughter, but while staying in Paris I fell in love with a beautiful young American girl who was studying at a school there. I knew her twin brother more for her sake than his own), and he witnessed my private mar-

riage with her. Within a year my uncle died, and I was about to travel to America with my wife, and acknowledge her publicly there, when you were born, and your dear mother lived but an hour. Her brother, Jonathan Lee, saw me in my deep affliction, and urged upon me that he could acquaint all American friends and save me a sorrowful journey. A year ago I learnt that you were entitled to the half-share of some mining property which had been left to Jonathan Lee and his sister, or, in event of their death, to you. I went to America, obtained the necessary papers, and made good your title to the share in the property, which Lee had been appropriating. He is in England, and may have instigated the attempt at robbery by bribing that scoundrel, the butler; but as the latter was shot when Gelert sprang on the man who aimed his pistol at Constance, we will let the matter drop. The other hired miscreant escaped, but I think Gelert must have hurt him."

Constance is lying on a sofa in the drawing-room, looking very lovely if a little frail. Archie is by her side, and Gelert rests his huge head against her hand.

"My darling, the doctor's orders are immediate change of air for you. A month ago I begged you to name the day, so now you will promise to agree to a very quiet wedding here a week or two hence, and then I will take you abroad."

No answer, and the girl raised one hand to cover her face, which it could not do.

"Tell her to say 'Yes,' Gelert!" said Archie, laughingly raising the great dog's paws in supplication.

"May Gelert come too?"

"To be sure; and here comes my father to hear the glorious news, and to prevent our good Aunt Dorothy fussing about trousseaux!"

One more telegram reaches Mr. Jonathan Lee, and it convinces him that he will do well to be thankful for mercies received, and to hasten to his native land—there to arrange for the regular disbursement of half his income from the mines, in favour of his young English nephew, whom he would never see or hear of, unless he failed in the above arrangements.

"We start for America to-morrow!" commenced Jonathan Lee to his wife.

"Oh, my! I haven't got half the things I meant to buy in Europe."

"And you never will!" gloomily responded Jonathan.

THE SQUIRE'S TOASTS.

ALL round the jovial Christmas party,
The wine had circled with the sun;
The Squire had charged us, loud and hearty,
To fill our glasses every one.
White-whiskered, ruddy-faced, and jolly,
He stood the picture of a host:
For background, silver, oak and holly,
With right-hand raised, he gave the Toast.

Our Absent Friends: their name is legion,
Heaven keep them wheresoe'er they be;
All English lads in every region,
God bless them, and all ships at sea!
Some boys in life have barely started,
Some friends are toiling, bearded men;
But here's their healths from whom we're parted,
And may we all meet soon again.

Sweethearts and Wives, maids, matrons, mothers,
Their toast must next in order come,
Well for the husbands, sons and brothers,
To whom God gives an English home!
We drink her health who fresh and sprightly,
Knows nought as yet of time or tears:
And hers, whose face smiles back as brightly,
At sixty as at twenty years!

For Old Lang Syne: be still a moment;
In silence drink, in silence stand:
This needs no friendly word, or comment,
Save on each side a clasping hand—
Some doors are closed we long to enter
In the fair light of other days,
And the dear faces, lost and tender,
Can meet no more our backward gaze!

And last, *In hope of Next Year's Meeting:*
Look up, the past is dead and gone—
True hearts, warm hands, kind eyes are greeting
The new life, as the years roll on!
Though faint and feeble dawns the presage,
A world of light must lie behind:
From soul to soul God speed the message,
Peace and goodwill to all mankind!

G. B. STUART.

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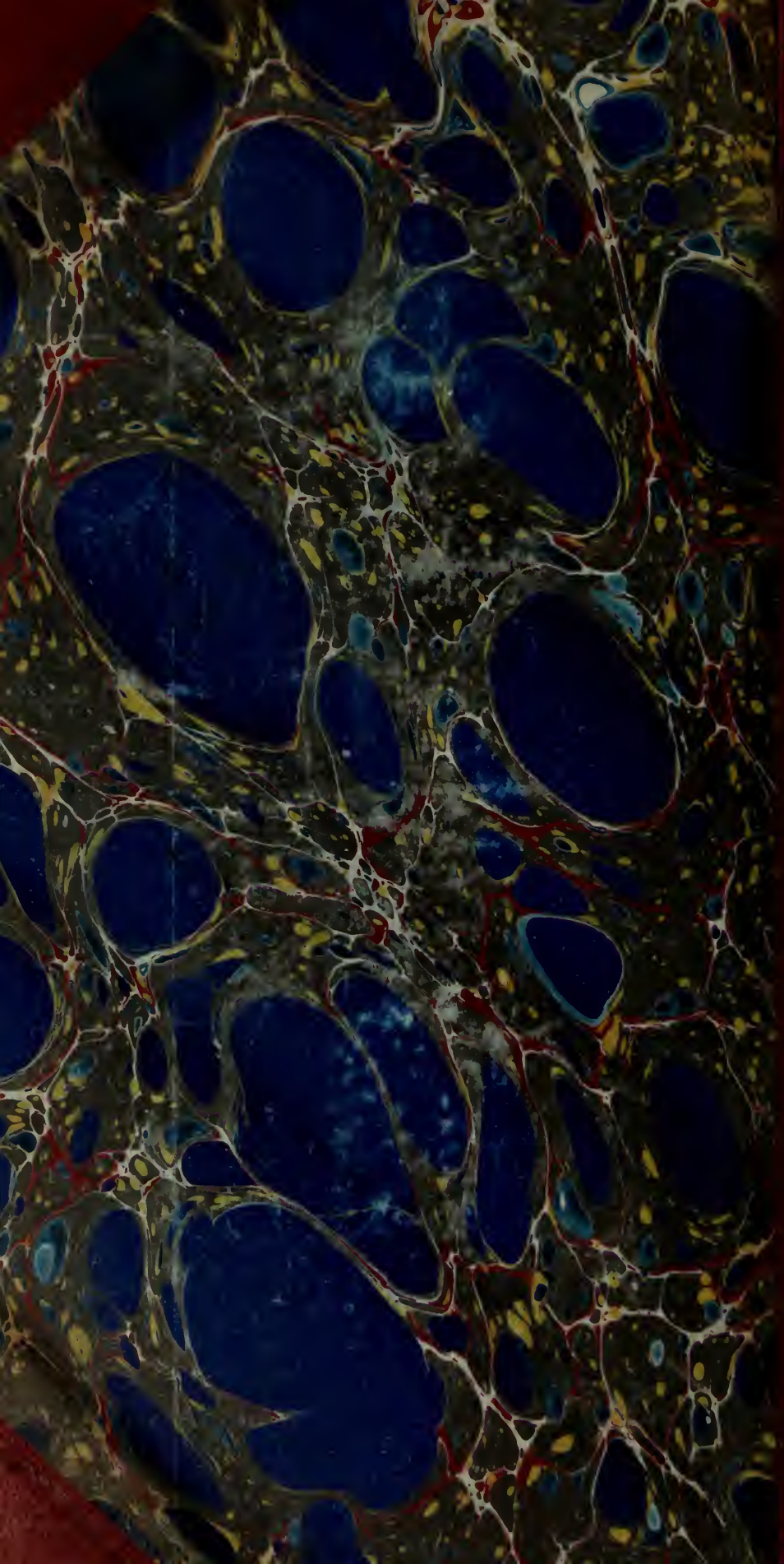
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